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THE

FALSE FRIEND:

A DOMESTIC STORY.

By MARY ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF POEMS, WALSINGHAM, ANGELINA, HUBERT DE SEVRAC, *&c. &c.*

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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LETTER L.

GERTRUDE *to* FRANCES.

Parſonage, Dec. 13, 1796.

I HAVE paſſed three days in the ſolitude of this romantic ſcene; I have endeavoured to tranquillize my mind, and to ſubmit with reſignation to that deſtiny which now ſeems inevitable; but ah! Frances, in flying to the ſtill ſhades of life, though we forget every other ſpecies of inquietude, we imperceptibly cheriſh the ſorrows of the heart: we correct a vitiated taſte for trifling occupations;

but we nurſe the poiſon of affection till it maſters our reſiſtance.

While I mingled with the gay and giddy throngs of diſſipated pleaſure, I ſometimes felt amuſed even to thoughtleſſneſs; my mind was occupied in reading the page of nature, variouſly delineating its many motly characters. Even the follies of mankind ſerved to excite attention, if only to condemn them; but now reflection faſtens on *one* object; all the pains and felicities of exiſtence ſeem to throng round *one* dear, dangerous idol; and this heart, which is never deſtined to be tranquil, yields to that influence which reaſon cannot conquer. Frances, I love Lord Denmore; I avow my folly; I love but him in this vaſt univerſe; and on his will depends the happineſs or miſery of my days.

On the morning after my arrival I roſe early, and reſolved to viſit the kind

BRITISH MUSEUM 48 60 MAY

kind old houſekeeper at Denmore Caſtle. The day was clear and froſty, and I hoped that the walk would tend to enliven the deep depreſſion of my ſpirits. Immediately on quitting my chamber, I deſcended to the valley; the woods were ſtripped of their foliage; the fields were in many parts inundated; the antique turrets of the Caſtle ſeemed to lift their battlements in mid-air, as if exulting over the deſolations of winter.

I ſoon entered the Park. Every object looked undeſcribably melancholy. I had only a few months ſince contemplated the ſpot in all its beauty; rich cultured fields, embowered by lofty and thick woods; verdant, luxurious, and glowing with ſummer ſplendours. The manſion which was now deſerted, or at leaſt appeared ſo to the ſickening eye of recollection, I remembered the ſcene of joy and feſtivity. The change was impreſſive, and abſorbed in a

gloomy reverie, I proceeded ſlowly along the path-way leading to the Caſtle.

Mrs. Walters, on ſeeing me paſs her window, ran out to welcome my arrival. But I inſtantly obſerved a fearful perturbation in her manner, which ſurpriſed me. Her look was myſterious; her colour changed from red to pale, and ſhe haſtily deſired me to enter the ſmall gothic paſſage leading to her parlour. I was at a loſs to account for this ſtrange and confuſed reception, till with a trembling articulation ſhe informed me, that Lord Denmore had, only three days before, arrived at the Caſtle.

This unexpected intelligence electrified my heart; at the ſame time my joy was infinite, for I felt aſſured that he had eſcaped the menaced rencontre with Mr. Treville. But even this conviction bore with it a new ſource of anxiety; conjecture whiſpered that perhaps

haps I had, in addition to my other conſcious pangs, to feel the crime of murder! I ſhivered and was loſt in thought, when Mrs. Walters again addreſſed me.

"You ſeem ſtrangely affected by the news I tell you," ſaid ſhe: "and I am afraid that you will feel ſtill more ſo when you know all."

I now faintly inquired whether any intelligence had arrived reſpecting Lady Denmore.

"None!" ſaid Mrs. Walters.

"What is the cauſe of my guardian's ſudden return to England?" ſaid I.

"Heaven only knows," replied Mrs. Walters: "we had no notice till the chaiſe ſtopped at the gates; and ſince that hour my Lord has chiefly ſhut himſelf up in the library, refuſing to ſee any body, excepting myſelf."

"How does he look?" ſaid I earneſtly.

"Sadly pale indeed," anſwered the houſekeeper. "He is ſo much altered that I ſcarcely knew him. I am ſure it would grieve your heart to ſee him: he is not long for this world, or I am much miſtaken."

"Has he no phyſician?"

"Lord bleſs you, my dear, what could the doctors do? His diſeaſe ſeems to be in his mind; he is more melancholy than ſick. He is reduced almoſt to a ſhadow; Heaven grant him patience!"

"I wiſh I could ſee him, if only for a moment," ſaid I.

"That is impoſſible," replied Mrs. Walters: "for on finding that you had quitted the Parſonage and was gone to London, he became terribly angry, and declared that he never would ſpeak to you more. 'I placed her in a ſafe and honourable aſylum,' ſaid my Lord, 'and ſhe will have reaſon to repent the

hour when ſhe left it.' I ſhuddered.

"This is not all," ſaid Mrs. Walters. "Poor parſon Pew is likewiſe in diſgrace with my Lord, for bearing you company: he called him a pliant old blockhead; and added, that he ſhould ſoon quit the Parſonage, as a puniſhment for his folly."

"I muſt, I will ſee Lord Denmore," ſaid I: "my ſituation is deſperate as my thoughts; I cannot be more forlorn, more wretched."

"Do not attempt it," interrupted Mrs. Walters: "you know that my Lord is of a paſſionate temper, and the conſequences may prove fatal. It is at the peril of my Lord's diſpleaſure that I have ſuffered you to enter the Caſtle: haſten back to the Parſonage, and do not, on any account, ſuffer him to ſee you."

"Oh God!" exclaimed I, "to what humiliations am I expoſed, to what miſeries ſubjected, by a deſtiny as unmerited as it is ſevere. There muſt be ſome undivulged, ſome yet unpuniſhed crime, for which the wrath of Heaven viſits my defenceleſs boſom. Whereever I turn my eyes, new misfortunes menace; whenever I cloſe them, new dreams of horror fill my diſtracted brain, and almoſt hurry me to madneſs. All the errors into which I have fallen have been involuntary. I have never meditated evil to any breathing thing; and yet all the tribes of exiſting beings ſeem armed againſt me!"

Whither ſhall I fly? Frances, there is but one calm, ſilent reſting-place, where ſorrow finds a long repoſe, and envy turns aſide to pity!

Mrs. Walters looked earneſtly at me, while I uttered the ſtrong emotions of my

my mind; ſhe ſeemed to ſympathiſe in my deſpair; and the ſigh which ſhe gave to my misfortunes communicated a momentary conſolation. Again ſhe entreated me to return to the Parſonage, to avoid the preſence of Lord Denmore, to obey his commands, and to await his deciſion with patience. "My Lord will not live long," ſaid ſhe, again ſighing; "and he may yet be induced to pardon you."

"Not live! Oh merciful God!" exclaimed I: "he muſt, he ſhall! I will dedicate my life to his preſervation: I will attend him, ſooth him, bear all his ſtern unkindneſs, his reproaches, even his hate, to ſave him."

"Alas! it will be uſeleſs," ſaid Mrs. Walters, wiping away a tear, which was ſtealing down her cheek: "he is fading from us every hour; and I fear that no mortal aid can preſerve his exiſtence another ſummer." As ſhe ſpoke,

we heard footſteps advancing near the door: I inſtantly drew back, and hiding myſelf behind the curtain, Lord Denmore paſſed without ſeeing me. In a moment I returned to the window, from which I beheld this celeſtial being proceeding towards the wood. His mien was deeply dejected, his form meagre, his arms folded, his pace ſlow and feeble. I threw myſelf on Mrs. Walters's boſom and wept like an infant.

"Now is the time for you to eſcape," ſaid the good houſekeeper: "you can take the path acroſs the meadow, which opens from the Wilderneſs; and thereby ſecurely avoid my Lord in his morning walk to the root bridge."

"Is he going that way?" ſaid I. "How ſhall I be certain not to meet him?"

"I think he will not proceed beyond the ivy grotto," ſaid Mrs. Walters; "becauſe every morning, ſince his return, he

he has remained there at leaſt two hours, and ſeemingly in deep meditation. I obſerved him from my Lady's chamber-window; and he looked ſo pitiouſly ſad, that I could not help crying to ſee him."

"Cannot I watch till he has reached the grotto? I ſhall then be certain that my retreat is ſafe," ſaid I.

"It is now eight o'clock," replied Mrs. Walters; "and he generally returns at ten to breakfaſt: from that hour he never quits the library till paſt midnight, but walks about, and talks to himſelf, and ſeems diſtreſſed more than I can tell you."

"We will go and watch him," ſaid I: "and as ſoon as he has fixed himſelf in his ſolitary retreat, I will return to the Parſonage." Mrs. Walters at firſt heſitated; but on my promiſing to obey her wiſhes reſpecting my con-

cealment, we aſcended to Lady Denmore's chamber.

Had I entered a ſepulchre, the ſenſation which my heart felt could not have been more chilling. All objects ſeemed to reſt in mournful deſertion, as if ſympathiſing with the fate of their loſt miſtreſs. The little ornaments of her toilet, the bed on which ſhe had ſo often ſlept, the withered plants before her window which her hand had reared, all conſpired to impreſs my ſoul with undeſcribable melancholy.

After contemplating even the moſt trifling objects with an intereſt which was undefinable, I ſtole towards the window. Lord Denmore was leaning over the bridge; his forehead was preſſed upon his hand: he ſeemed rooted to the ſpot. A thouſand painful recollections abſorbed my ſenſes: all that had paſſed, Fancy at this moment, in the moſt vivid colours, pictured to my

my mind. There was I, Frances, beholding the object of my ſoul's idolatry, the excluſive joy of my ſlow-withering heart, pale, penſive, drooping, mournful. Conſcience whiſpered, that I had been acceſſary to all his ſorrows; that I had been the cauſe of that jealouſy which tempted Lady Denmore to abjure the ſacred bond of domeſtic happineſs; every event that followed was the reſult of this raſh moment; a moment favoured by my aſſiſtance, though undeſignedly. The death of Mr. Treville, of which I entertained not the ſmalleſt doubt, next filled my breaſt with horror. My ſituation was ſuch as defeats the power of language. I ſcarcely knew that Mrs. Walters was ſtanding near me, when I exclaimed, "There is but one remedy —to die, and to forget it."

Alarmed by my agitated tone and manner, ſhe reminded me of my promiſe. I entreated that ſhe would ſuffer me,

me, only five minutes longer, to behold the beloved, the unhappy partner of my diſaſtrous deſtiny. The deſerted chamber of Lady Denmore ſeemed to terminate all my earthly proſpects. On turning towards a cabinet, at which I had frequently ſeen her writing, I inſtantly recollected that, at the moment of her death, when I threw myſelf acroſs the body in an agony of grief, I had loſt the packet which ſhe had given me, and which ſhe aſſured me would elucidate the miſery of my fate. This diſcovery for a moment intereſted my boſom; but when I again bent my eyes on Lord Denmore, every ſelfiſh regret inſtantaneouſly vaniſhed, and to him all the ſenſations of my ſoul were excluſively devoted.

The Caſtle clock ſtruck nine. It ſtartled me from my reverie; and I now felt the neceſſity of my departure. I embraced Mrs. Walters, and with a painful

painful effort tore myſelf from the window. Deſcending to the hall, I had to paſs the library door: it was open. I ſtopped; I looked acroſs the room: the buſt, the ſternly-frowning buſt of Lord Denmore met my eyes; and I was near ſinking on the pavement. Mrs. Walters, perceiving my agitation, ſupported me till we reached her parlour; from whence, in a few minutes, we proceeded together, by a private path, towards the Parſonage.

From that period I have never quitted my chamber. I have at intervals, when my ſpirits acquired a tranſient renovation, detailed the events of that intereſting epocha. Mr. and Mrs. Pew have been unremitting in their attentions, though the former has made two viſits to the Caſtle, without being admitted to the preſence of Lord Denmore. As no communication has taken place between the

the families, perhaps my being at the Parſonage is ſtill a ſecret.

Frances, farewell. Every hour convinces me, that though ſolitude may tranquillize the weary ſenſes, it never will meliorate the anguiſh of the heart.

LETTER LI.

The Same to the Same.

Parſonage, Dec. 14, 1796.

I HAVE this moment received intelligence which has nearly annihilated me. Lord Denmore is informed of his wife's unhappy fate; and, at his particular requeſt, her remains are to be depoſited in the family vault, where I once hoped to ſleep for ever.

Frances,

Frances, how ſhall I ſupport the ſcene! How ſhall I behold the widowed mourner, and yet conceal thoſe events which Lady Denmore, in her laſt moments, confided to my boſom! Yet, by revealing what I know, I muſt apparently criminate myſelf: I muſt confeſs all that paſſed reſpecting Mr. Treville, my releaſe from captivity, my journey to Edgware, my connivance in the plot to conceal Lady Denmore's death, and the precarious ſituation in which I left her infamous ſeducer.

What will Lord Denmore think, how will he act, on the conviction of my having again deceived him? How ſhall I bear to witneſs his anguiſh, his regret? Perhaps Mr. Treville is dead of the wound which he received from the piſtol: the idea almoſt petrifies me with horror.

The bell tolls! It is the knell for Lady Denmore's death. Again! again!

Oh

Oh God! this ſcene muſt cloſe. I can ſuſtain the part which I have acted no longer. My fortitude ſhrinks. I loſe the power of reſiſtance. I muſt be gone, or periſh!

I write near the window of my little library. The evening is ſerene, the ſun is ſetting; the crimſon light fades from the marble tablet, beneath which Lady Denmore's aſhes are doomed to reſt for ever. Ah, Frances! how ſtrikingly does the calm ſcene before me contraſt the contending tumults which tear and agonize my boſom!

The bell continues to toll! Its ſlow and deep vibrations break through the ſtill air, and ſteal along the valley. The duſk of twilight thickens; and the ſky has nearly loſt the glowing tinge which, only a few minutes ſince, gave it both warmth and luſtre. So paſſes life away; tranſient is the beauty, the animation of its loveliеſt ſcenes. The dark, the

ſolemn

ſolemn hour will come, and wrap us in oblivion.—Adieu.

I HAVE been interrupted. Mr. Pew came to inform me that the corpſe will arrive at the Caſtle to-morrow morning; and in the evening it will be depoſited in its laſt lonely habitation. He has ſeen Lord Denmore, whoſe diſtreſs is infinite.

Frances, of what ſtubborn compound is this heart, which throbs within my boſom, formed, that it can bear the unceaſing, the convulſive pangs of grief unparalleled? Have I more, or leſs, than human energy? Is it fortitude, or want of feeling? Anſwer me; for, to my ſelf-examining faculties, I appear a being incomprehenſible.

The gloom of cloſing twilight prevents my proceeding. The bat begins to flit near my caſement. The white marble of the Denmore monument is faintly viſible. A thouſand mournful ideas

ideas float in my imagination. I ſhiver, I tremble! Farewell, till to-morrow.

Six o'Clock.

It is juſt daylight, and I reſume my pen. The chilly hour is refreſhing to my feveriſh boſom. I have paſſed the night in ruminations: but even the ſlumber of mental fatigue, which at ſhort intervals overpowered my ſenſes, could not wholly vanquiſh the miſery of thought; for in my dreams my ſorrows were ſtill felt, my proſpects darkened: a thouſand viſions thronged about my pillow; and, amidſt the terrifying phalanx, I fancied that I beheld my mother, Lady Denmore, my diſtracted guardian. I heard the funeral bell: its vibration ſeemed perpetual.

The ſun is juſt ſparkling above the horizon: the ſky is dappled with grey clouds, which are bordered with the roſy light of morning. How beautiful

is

is Nature! How wretched, ah! Frances, how wretched are her children!

I know not what I write. I am almoſt frantic.

The air is intenſely cold: and the white froſt thickens the ſmall caſement of my chamber. The ſun will diſpel the congealed vapours: but my intellectual ſource, the fount of Reaſon, will ſoon be eternally frozen.

The half-famiſhed birds are twittering near my window. Frances! Perhaps for the laſt time I hear them! When next they offer up their welcome to the ſun, I may be journeying to more tranquil regions.

Whither——?

Heaven only knows!

Above one corner of the wood I can juſt diſtinguiſh the battlements of the Caſtle, beneath which is Lord Denmore's chamber. Perhaps he ſleeps; for the exceſs of grief will ſometimes lull the ſenſes.

ſenſes. Oh, my friend! my guardian! eſtranged from your affection, to what aſylum ſhall I fly for ſhelter? Who will receive an orphan, unknown and unprotected? The deep impreſſion of unpitied ſorrow will prove but a ſad paſſport to the unfeeling boſom; and the ſympathizing heart, while I exiſt, ſhall never know my ſtory. I will not continue to afflict, ſince I ſhall never have the power to comfort. My anguiſh ſhall be cheriſhed, untold to all but you, my earlieſt friend, my gentleſt counſellor.

How tranquil were thoſe hours which we paſſed together in innocent ſecluſion! How harmleſs were the ſports of infancy! how ſmoothly Time journeyed through the long noiſeleſs day; and how refreſhing were the ſlumbers which beguiled the ſilent hour of all its horrors! No tear was felt to roll, no ſigh was known to ſtruggle in our boſoms. Dreams never viſited

our

our pillow, except to anticipate ſome new delight, or to remind us of paſt guiltleſs pleaſures. Yet how often, in thoſe moments of ſerene enjoyment, did Fancy wander to more advanced periods. How frequently did I languiſh for that hour, when I ſhould become acquainted with the tumultuous cares of life; mingle with buſy crowds, behold more ſplendid ſcenes, converſe with various objects, read new characters, explore new minds, and experience new viciſſitudes.

I often read Lord Denmore's letters: I trace in every line the tenderneſs of affection, the zeal of friendſhip, and the glow of philanthropy. How unworthy muſt that mortal have proved, who could alienate a heart ſo nobly, ſo firmly, ſo generouſly attached! I make the comment; but I ſhudder while I make it. I then endeavour to reconcile my mind to the miſery that awaits it, by the ſpecious ſophiſtry which marks the predeſtinarian.

deſtinarian. "I was born to endure this ſorrow: it is my deſtiny," I ſay; and for a moment I feel reſigned to the viciſſitudes of my fortune.

Tell me, Frances! oh, tell me, why the good ſhould ſuffer, the guilty triumph? What is virtue, if it is not the paſſport to happineſs? Is it an airy phantom, which leads to nothing?—Impoſſible! And yet we ſee the nobleſt of the human race oppreſſed, afflicted! the baſe and ſordid proſperous! We behold a Denmore wretched; a Upas, revelling in all the joys and luxuries of life. Are not ſuch examples chilling to the ſoul? Do they not palſy the energies of reaſon, make virtue feeble, ſtrengthen the power of vice, deſtroy the bonds of ſocial intercourſe, and undermine the very ſource of moral rectitude? Unqueſtionably.

When merit is applauded, folly will be annihilated, and not till then: for while

while the world continues to encourage and to ſanction baſeneſs, the human mind, having no object to excite emulation, will degenerate into nothing.

I ſicken at the ſcene before me: I abhor the turmoil of life; I ſhrink from ſociety; and were not Lord Denmore in exiſtence——

I dare not conclude the ſentence. Adieu.

LETTER LII.

The Same to the Same.

Denmore Parſonage, Dec. 16, 1796.

At ſix o'clock this evening the funeral aſcended from the valley. I watched the gloomy cavalcade from my chamber window; and I envied that annihilation which had finally cloſed the ſcene of

Lady Denmore's ſorrows. The only object which excited my pity was my dejected guardian. I ſaw him deſcend from the carriage, and follow the corpſe into the church, which was pompouſly decorated and illumined for the ſolemn ſad occaſion.

As ſoon as the crowd had attended the mourning family, I ſtole from my chamber: the duſk of evening favoured my concealment; and I took my ſeat in the church-porch, from whence, unſeen, I beheld the long aiſle, where the body reſted during a part of the funeral ceremony. I could plainly diſtinguiſh Lord Denmore's countenance, as he ſtood near the coffin: it was awfully penſive; his eyes were bent upon the pall, and his features expreſſive of a mournful reſignation.

Frances, I did not ſhed one tear: for grief and ſympathy too powerfully graſped my brain to allow the ſource of ſorrow a channel through my eyes. It was

was the mute deſpair of unutterable anguiſh. A benumbing torpor ſeemed to poſſeſs my ſoul: I ſaw the lamenting multitude, the ſable pall, the widowed huſband, the armorial decorations of the long dim aiſle; I heard the ſublime and ſolemn ceremony: every word came diſtinctly to my ear, and yet I wept not!

The ſervice being nearly ended, and the coffin about to be depoſited in the family ſepulchre, I again returned to my chamber. From the caſement I beheld the cavalcade again deſcending to the Caſtle. The moon ſhone dimly: I watched the leſſening gloom, as it receded from my view; the coaches were preceded by the domeſtics of the family in deep mourning, and bearing torches. I ſaw them ſlowly croſs the park, till they reached the Caſtle. In a few minutes the torches were extinguiſhed, and no light but that of the pale and melan-

choly moon was visible from my chamber.

I now felt a new and petrifying horror. My eyes wandered by turns over the dim landscape, and to the sepulchre of the ill-fated Lady Denmore. The door was closed at its entrance, and all without was silent as within. I shrunk, I shuddered; but I had not power to quit the window.

The curate and his wife were so deeply affected by the scene they had just witnessed, that they excused themselves from meeting me again during the evening. I have therefore dedicated the silent hours to you. Oh, Frances! what an infinity of reflection does the death of Lady Denmore awaken! Youth, beauty, sensibility, and virtue, all, all sacrificed at the shrine of a vain and false ambition! Alas, how little does happiness consist in the glaring shows of life!

life! How much more does it depend on ourſelves, than we imagine! There is but one paſſion of the human mind, which has power to reſiſt the force of Reaſon; and even that we may learn to maſter, if we have reſolution to fly from its early faſcinations. But reflection cannot influence our feelings, when once the poiſon has fixed its dominion in our boſoms: Hope cheriſhes the deluſive phantom; Fancy gives it the moſt attractive charms; and that pernicious inſtigator, Self-love, forbids us to relinquiſh its deluſions, till Time ſteals off the deceptive veil, and ſhows us the taunting demons, Caprice, Satiety, and Diſappointment.

Sometimes, in my hours of meditation, I attribute all the inquietudes of my heart to the ill-judged ſecluſion of my early infancy. Had I been gradually taught to know the world, I might have been leſs ſuſceptible of its various

pains and pleaſures. By frequently witneſſing the atrocities of mankind, I ſhould have been more guarded againſt them; and by an intercourſe with the more amiable, I might have felt, in a fainter degree, the powerful attractions of Lord Denmore. Miſtaken is that tutor who would hope to expand the mind in any other ſchool but that of Nature. Youth ſhould be enlightened by ſociety; it ſhould be conducted through the mazy labyrinths of life before the paſſions are awakened. It would then behold all objects with a familiarity which is the parent of indifference. Habit would reconcile it to the evils attendant on human deſtiny; and pleaſure would fail to exhilarate the heart beyond the boundaries of Reaſon.

Till my recent emancipation, I was condemned to vegitate in little leſs than a monaſtic ſecluſion. I knew nothing of the world, but by the few books

books which I had been permitted to read; I was allowed no ſource of pleaſure, but in the frequent letters of Lord Denmore. They were too fatally calculated to impreſs the imagination; too tenderly intereſting, not to fill my boſom with affections, which their repetition cheriſhed till they became a part of my exiſtence. The hour at length arrived, when I was deſtined to behold this generous, this prepoſſeſſing, faſcinating mortal! My fancy was elated almoſt to ecſtaſy. A thouſand anticipated joys thronged round my heart, and I conſidered the moment when I ſhould experience his long promiſed protection, as the ſure commencement of every earthly happineſs.

I flew to meet him. He received me coldly. My *amour propre* was wounded; my fancy chilled by diſappointment. The inquietude which ſuc-

ceeded this electric ſhock, was fatal to my repoſe; I reſolved to convince Lord Denmore that I deſerved his friendſhip; I ſought to pleaſe him, to evince my gratitude. His returning kindneſs ſoothed my mind; his ſociety charmed it into forgiveneſs for the pangs he had occaſioned me to ſuffer; and while I endeavoured to make him a convert, I was unconſciouſly the bigot of his attractions.

I hear a loud knocking at the garden gate! I tremble; but I muſt liſten——

What can it mean? It is now paſt midnight. Heaven grant that all is well at the Caſtle.

The knocking continues; I will meet the meſſenger, though he may bring news that will annihilate me. Oh! why, why am I thus ſenſitively organized?

It was a ſervant with a note from Lord Denmore, deſiring my attend-

ance

ance at nine in the morning on buſineſs of importance.

Why does my boſom ſo ſtrongly palpitate? Frances! I ſhall once more behold Lord Denmore! Perhaps this interview will be our *laſt*.

Oh God! what an infinity of anguiſh is comprized in that ſhort word! —Adieu.

LETTER LIII.

The Same to the Same.

Denmore Parſonage, Dec. 19, 1796.

At the hour appointed I repaired to the Caſtle. My ſpirits had been ſo repeatedly haraſſed by mournful events, that I had ſcarcely a ſenſation which was not exhauſted; and I really believe, that

an excess of joy would at that moment have proved more fatal to my feelings, than even the most dreadful of calamities.

With a calm and stedfast eye I looked towards that mansion which contained all that was dear to me on this side the grave. I walked with a quick pace, as if Hope gave my feet swiftness. I felt the most extraordinary mixture of pain and delight that ever occupied the human breast, when I reflected that, in a few moments, I should hear, see, and converse with Lord Denmore, though his language might be reproachful, and his manner chillingly repulsive; for of regaining his affection I had relinquished every idea.

As I passed Mrs. Walters's apartments, she beckoned me from the window; and I reluctantly turned my steps towards the Gothic door which led to them.

them. On entering the parlour, her deep mourning and melancholy countenance impreſſed me forcibly.

"Thank Heaven! my Lord has at laſt conſented to ſee you, Miſs Gertrude," ſaid the good woman; "and I hope that the meeting will reconcile you to each other: for it would be ſhocking indeed, if my Lord ſhould die in animoſity with any one, and particularly with a perſon he once loved ſo dearly."

"Once loved!" repeated I. "Ah, my kind friend, Lord Denmore never loved me. Pity was the only motive for his conduct; and contempt is very nearly allied to that ſenſation."

"You are miſtaken in your opinion of my Lord's diſpoſition," replied Mrs. Walters. "I am certain that you are, at this moment, dearer to him than all the world beſide."

"Why do you think ſo?" ſaid I eagerly.

"Becauſe, only laſt night, as I paſſed through the great hall, after the funeral, I heard my Lord walking about the library, and talking to himſelf; and he mentioned your name two or three times: but I dare not venture to repeat his words."

"Why not?" ſaid I. "You may rely on my ſecrecy."

"You would perhaps be angry, if you knew what he ſaid: indeed I ſhuddered when I heard it; though from my ſoul I am ſorry to find what had happened."

"To what do you allude?" ſaid I, trembling. "Is Mr. Treville dead?"

"Not that I know," replied Mrs. Walters. "If he were, it would be no great matter; for a blacker-hearted villain never lived, notwithſtanding his ſmooth tongue and plauſible manners."

"I conjure you briefly to tell me, what my guardian ſaid," interrupted I.

"Was

"Was it any thing about Lady Denmore?"

"O, no," anſwered the houſekeeper: "it was ſomething that my Lord would not have confeſſed, had my poor Lady been alive. But I am as ſecret as the grave: I will ſay nothing, though I cannot help pitying you ſincerely."

I was now perplexed and impatient beyond bearing. I longed, yet dreaded to know what Lord Denmore could have ſaid reſpecting myſelf, of ſuch importance, and yet ſo calculated to inſpire commiſeration. Again I urged her to relieve my anxiety; to inform me of all ſhe knew; and to depend on my forgiveneſs.

After an evident conflict in her boſom, ſhe took my hand, and, burſting into tears, replied, "I did not think my Lord was capable of ſuch an action." I ſtarted.

"Do

"Do not be afraid, Miſs Gertrude: I will never be the cauſe of your diſgrace; I will ſooner quit the Caſtle, than betray you," ſaid Mrs. Walters.

"I do not comprehend what you allude to," interrupted I, with ſome impetuoſity: "and ſince your language is ſo ambiguous, I inſiſt on an explanation."

"Why, then," ſaid Mrs. Walters, heſitating and fearful, "I heard my Lord ſay, that he wiſhed he had died before he had won your affections; and that your love for him had proved the curſe of his exiſtence." I felt myſelf turn pale. Mrs. Walters reached a chair, and begged me not to be alarmed, again repeating her promiſes of ſecreſy.

"Did he ſay any thing more?" inquired I faintly.

"Yes," replied ſhe: "he ſaid that he ſhould ſoon, very ſoon, be united to

you

you for ever." The conflicts of my mind overpowered me, and I fainted.

On recovering I found myſelf in the library, attended by Lord Denmore, on whoſe ſhoulder my head was reclined, and whoſe arm ſupported me. I ſhrunk almoſt to the ground; I ſcarcely breathed. Mrs. Walters held a glaſs of water to my lips; and my guardian heaved a ſigh that penetrated my heart. The paleneſs of his countenance, the languor of his eyes, the trembling of his whole frame, and, more than all, the ſilent tear which fell upon my hand, as he preſſed it to his boſom, nearly deprived me of exiſtence. I feebly articulated, "Oh, Heavens!" and again ſunk into his arms, in an agony of diſtreſs.

"This acute ſenſibility will deſtroy you," ſaid Lord Denmore. "I relied on your fortitude, or I ſhould not have deſired this meeting. Collect your ſpi-

rits;

rits; call Reaſon to your aid; and add not to the weight of my afflictions; for they are already ſcarcely ſupportable."

I endeavoured to raiſe my head from his ſhoulder. I attempted to ſpeak; but my efforts proved ineffectual. My guardian, ſeeing my agitation, conjured me to remember, that he had many ſorrows to encounter; adding, "I have much to ſay to you; ſeveral important requeſts to make, and little time to utter them; for to-morrow I recommence my journey, and Heaven only knows if we ſhall ever meet again."

I could not anſwer him: this dreadful intelligence ſeemed to petrify my heart. He continued:

"Late laſt night, by expreſs, I received a letter from the Ducheſs of Aldborough, wherein ſhe deſires that, without delay, you would haſten to her. She ſpeaks of important news, which

ſhe has to communicate; and as her health is at this moment in a precarious ſtate, the ſooner you depart the better."

I roſe feebly from the ſofa, but I had not power to utter a ſyllable.

"Yet ſtay," cried Lord Denmore gently detaining me: "you muſt not think of travelling in this ſtate of mind alone. The good people, under whoſe care I have placed you, will, if I make the requeſt, attend you. Though I diſapproved of your late viſit to London, I forgive it; for I have not reſolution to wound a heart, which ſeems already overcharged with affliction."

Lord Denmore now requeſted Mrs. Walters to ſupport me; for I was ſtill too feeble to ſuſtain myſelf: and immediately writing a ſhort note to Mr. Pew, diſpatched it, with orders that the ſervant ſhould bring back a deciſive anſwer. "If he cannot attend you, I will," ſaid my guardian: "it is neceſſary that I ſhould

ſhould paſs through London in my way to Harwich; and there can be no reaſon why I ſhould not conduct you ſafely to the Ducheſs."

My guardian now quitted the room, leaving me to the care of Mrs. Walters. My ſpirits were ſomewhat revived by her attentions; but a load of diſtreſs ſtill hung about my heart on account of Lord Denmore's intended journey. "You hear," ſaid I, "that we are to loſe him."

"I fear we ſhall never ſee him again," replied Mrs. Walters; "for if he ſets out alone, in his preſent ſtate of mind, it is ten to one that he will not ſurvive it. I wiſh my Lord would take you with him."

"Impoſſible!" ſaid I. "The world would fix a thouſand falſe interpretations on ſuch an event; for malevolence will not allow the poſſibility of a kind or generous action without placing it to the account of

ſome

ſome ſelfiſh motive." Then pauſing a moment, with a ſigh I added, "Neither dare I truſt myſelf, feeling as I do, to be the companion of Lord Denmore."

Mrs. Walters ſmiled.

"Would to God you had always been of that opinion!" cried ſhe.

"The danger has not always been of ſuch magnitude," ſaid I.

"But my Lady was then living; and for her ſake you ought to have been more prudent."

"I ought indeed," anſwered I; "though ſhe never loved Lord Denmore."

"Still ſhe was his wife," added Mrs. Walters; "and you ſhould have conſidered how heinous a crime it is to ſteal away the affections of a huſband."

"I have been the victim of events," interrupted I: "and Heaven can bear witneſs, that I never even thought of ſupplanting Lady Denmore. To her own

own folly, and to the arts of others, she was sacrificed."

"Yes, my Lord confessed that there was a great deal of artifice employed; for I remember his words," said Mrs. Walters. 'But for the most barbarous deception, thou, Gertrude, hadst not been dishonoured.'

"Were these Lord Denmore's words?" inquired I, aghast and wondering.

"Exactly; syllable for syllable," replied Mrs. Walters.

"Dishonoured! what could he mean? by whom?"

"That I can easily guess," said the housekeeper: "but, as I told you before, I will suffer death rather than reveal what I heard to any person living besides yourself."

"Dishonoured!" repeated I. "It is not possible that such a word could have been uttered by Lord Denmore,

and

and applied to me. Did he ſay nothing that would explain this myſtery? did he mention no other name but mine?"

"Yes, he talked a great deal to himſelf, and I heard him pronounce the words, 'villain,' and 'huſband.' He then wiſhed himſelf in the grave with the injured angel whom he had deſtroyed; that of courſe was my poor Lady: then he raved about the falſehood of his friend; that, moſt likely, was Mr. Treville: and then he again ſpoke of his darling, his unhappy Gertrude."

"You aſtoniſh, and at the ſame time perplex me," ſaid I. "Perhaps Lord Denmore's ſorrow overpowered him, and he was deprived of reaſon. The ſtrange and incoherent language which he uttered, convinces me that he was not in his ſenſes."

Again Mrs. Walters ſmiled. "Come, come, Miſs Gertrude," ſaid ſhe, "you cannot

cannot make a fool of an old woman, or perſuade me that my own ears deceived me. If you queſtion the truth of what I ſay, I will repeat it word for word before my Lord; though I ſhould be turned out of doors the next minute. I ſcorn a falſehood as much as my betters; and I have no motive but for your good, in repeating what was ſaid to your diſadvantage."

I perceived that Mrs. Walters was piqued by my ſcepticiſm, and I did not wiſh to augment her chagrin by any farther queſtions. At this moment Lord Denmore returned; he brought me word that Mrs. Pew was extremely ill, and not able to quit her bed; but that the good curate in a few hours would be ready to attend me.

I now propoſed returning to the Parſonage, and requeſted my guardian to name the time when I ſhould ſet out for London.

"The

"The ſooner the better; I ſhould adviſe to-morrow morning at day-break as the lateſt period," replied Lord Denmore. "My chaiſe ſhall therefore be at the Parſonage by ſix o'clock, if you have no objection."

I bowed aſſent, and we parted.

I found Mrs. Pew ill with a violent cold, which ſhe had caught by the dampneſs of the preceding evening, while attending the funeral of Lady Denmore. Her pulſes were quick, her eyes languid, her cheeks fluſhed, and her lips parched with fever. She had received ſuch medical advice as the neareſt village afforded; and though ſhe was evidently indiſpoſed, there at firſt appeared no ſymptoms of imminent danger. I remained a great part of the day by her bed-ſide; attending her, and adminiſtering ſuch medicines as had been preſcribed. But to my infinite chagrin her fever increaſed; and, before

ſun-

ſun-ſet, ſhe gave ſtrong ſymptoms of delirium.

The good curate was almoſt diſtracted; for it is in the humbler paths of life that domeſtic ſorrow takes the deepeſt root. There folly has not deadened the fine nerve of ſenſibility, nor that tyrant cuſtom blunted the keeneſt arrows of diſtreſs. The ſcene of happineſs, depending on only a few actors, the loſs of a ſingle object impedes its progreſs, and the uniform harmony of events is for a time interrupted. But in buſy cities, on the noiſy, tumultuous ſtage of life, the machinery being in continual motion, changing with every moment, and every moment preſenting new ſubjects for wonder or applauſe, the mind cannot fix on any one ſenſation; it roves with the ſucceſſion of events, and forgetting what has paſt, looks only to the future.

The

The whole night paſſed in ſolicitude, and Mrs. Pew's malady ſeemed every inſtant augmenting; I diſpatched a ſhort note to Lord Denmore at three o'clock, informing him of the peril which was now evident, and of my apprehenſions that the curate would not be able to attend me. Indeed I had little inclination to quit the Parſonage at ſuch a moment; friendſhip, gratitude, and humanity demanded thoſe attentions which I knew not how to relinquiſh without violating their claims. My ſituation was painfully perplexing; and my anxiety equal to my ſolicitude.

The meſſenger ſoon returned with Lord Denmore's anſwer, informing me that he had diſpatched an expreſs to London, requiring the immediate preſence of an eminent phyſician; he alſo added, that in ſo critical a moment, he did not think it either humane or grateful to leave the Parſonage; but

that if I was fearful of incurring the Ducheſs's diſpleaſure by farther delay, he was ready to attend me. Thus was I placed in a ſituation which involved me in a new perplexity. I gueſſed the motive of the Ducheſs's commands, in the promiſe made by the expiring Lady Denmore; but all intereſted feelings gave way to thoſe of gratitude; and I reſolved to wait the event of twelve hours, before I ſet out for London.

Early in the morning my guardian walked to the Parſonage; he requeſted to ſee me, and I quitted Mrs. Pew's chamber to obey his ſummons. His viſit was prompted by friendſhip; his language indicated the benevolence of his heart. He inquired after the invalid; appeared impatient for the phyſician's arrival; hoped that ſhe had every comfort and convenience; and concluded by ſaying, "She muſt not die,

die, Gertrude; ſhe muſt be reſtored, to enjoy the living of Denmore."

I ſnatched his hand, and, unconſcious of what I was doing, preſſed it to my lips. "Moſt generous and beſt of mortals!" exclaimed I. My heart was too full to allow of my proceeding. Lord Denmore darted towards the door, and abruptly informing me that he would call again in the evening, returned to the Caſtle.

At four o'clock the phyſician arrived. Mrs. Walters, who had been ſent by order of Lord Denmore to ſtay with Mrs. Pew, and to attend her, accompanied him to the chamber, while I remained with the rector in his ſtudy. In order to beguile the interval of ſolicitude, I now informed Mr. Pew of Lord Denmore's having preſented him the living; his ſatisfaction was evident even through his tears, while he replied, "I am thankful for his Lord-

ſhip's kindneſs; but I ſhall not live long to enjoy it, if it pleaſes the Diſpoſer of events to take my poor wife from me."

"She may recover!" ſaid I: "indeed ſhe may."

He ſighed, and faintly uttered, "God is all powerful! his will be done!"

While he was ſpeaking, a ſervant from the Caſtle entered the room with a letter from Lord Denmore. It was directed to Mr. Pew. He took it from the meſſenger, and inſtantly giving it to me, deſired me to open the cover. "My eyes are dim," ſaid he; "and I ſhall not be able to read it." I looked at him, and I perceived the big tears rolling down the furrows of his cheek. I conjured him to be patient, and broke the ſeal.

The envelope contained a bank note of one hundred pounds, with theſe words: 'The firſt quarter's payment for

for Miſs St. Leger's board and lodging, with many thanks from Lord Denmore.'

We looked earneſtly at each other; but neither of us had power to utter a ſyllable. The phyſician's return releaſed our embarraſſment, and afforded Mr. Pew an opportunity to recover from the moſt affecting of all ſenſations; the unexpected kindneſs of a noble and liberal nature, at a moment when diſtreſs and ſorrow agitated his boſom.

Our inquiries were eager and rapid. The phyſician, with evident concern, informed us, that the fever was of a malignant kind; and that, whoever had attended the patient, had, moſt probably, caught the infection. This intelligence did not alarm my mind: life had too many ſorrows in ſtore for me, to make death terrible. I entreated Mr. Pew to refrain from viſiting the ſick chamber; and aſſured him, that my

zeal and affection ſhould be unremitting. An opiate having been preſcribed by the phyſician, and the chamber ordered to be kept quiet, I employed my mind in writing this long letter. It is now near eleven o'clock, and Mrs. Pew ſtill ſleeps. Lord Denmore has been twice at the Parſonage, to inquire after the invalid; but he did not ſee any perſon excepting Mrs. Walters, who, at my earneſt requeſt, returned this evening to the Caſtle. A few hours will probably decide the fate of an ineſtimable woman; and I await the event of the night with awful reſignation.—Adieu.

LETTER LIV.

The Same to the Same.

Dec. 23, 1796.

On the ſecond morning after I concluded my laſt letter, Mrs. Pew's fever gave evident ſigns of convaleſcence. The phyſician, at Lord Denmore's particular requeſt, never quitted the Parſonage during forty-eight hours; and by inceſſant care her recovery was at length confidently expected. My guardian now reminded me of the Ducheſs's ſummons; and at the ſame time informed me, that as the Rector was ſtill anxious reſpecting his wife's ſituation, and as he was under the neceſſity of paſſing a few days in London, previous to the commencement of his continental journey, he would undertake

to conduct me safely. I immediately consulted Mrs. Pew on the propriety of my accepting this proposal. She assured me, that her confidence in Lord Denmore was unbounded; and the chaise being ordered to the door, before noon, we set out together.

An impressive melancholy, which bespoke a mind ill at ease, and nearly subdued by the lassitude of despondency, kept Lord Denmore silent, till we had some time lost sight of the Castle. Deeply absorbed by rumination, I neither spoke nor sighed during the first half hour: a variety of fears employed my thoughts; for I now considered a developement of all that had passed, respecting Lady Denmore and Mr. Treville, as inevitable.

As we had taken some refreshment previous to our setting out, Lord Denmore proposed continuing the journey with all the expedition possible, without even

even quitting the carriage. To this I had no objection; for I felt that inquietude which never fails to attend a mind labouring with anticipated calamities; I knew that there were many dreadful myſteries to unfold; and I longed eagerly for the moment when, whether propitiouſly or fatally, my deſtiny would be decided.

Shortly after the cloſe of evening we ſtopped in Portman-ſquare. Lord Denmore aſſiſted me in deſcending from the chaiſe, and with a trembling hand led me into the houſe: but how, Frances, ſhall I deſcribe my ſurpriſe, when Mrs. Sewell, in tears, haſtened to meet us; and with the moſt poignant ſorrow informed my guardian, that, not three hours before, the Ducheſs had expired.

Our conſternation was only to be equalled by our regret; and for many minutes both were unutterable. Lord Denmore took my hand, and conducted

me to the drawing-room, whither alſo Mrs. Sewell followed.

As ſoon as I had reſolution to ſpeak, I queſtioned her reſpecting the particulars of this unexpected and mournful event.

"Alas!" anſwered Mrs. Sewell, "her Grace has been depreſſed in mind ever ſince Lady Denmore's departure; but her high ſpirit endeavoured to conceal what her heart felt, and ſhe ſtruggled for a time with the affliction which at length deſtroyed her." Here, burſting into tears, ſhe added: "There were two events which confirmed the Ducheſs's ſorrow, and rendered it incurable." She pauſed. I began to feel faint, and trembled.

"I can gueſs at leaſt one of them," ſaid my guardian.

"You are right, my Lord," interrupted Mrs. Sewell. "My poor Lady's death!"

Lord

Lord Denmore ſat near a table; and leaning his head upon his hand, with a feeble voice added: "This has been indeed a houſe of mourning! May I aſk what other circumſtance could poſſibly affect her feelings, while they had to combat one of ſuch importance?"

"I truſt that the ſtory was untrue," replied Mrs. Sewell: "indeed, I am convinced it was."

"Then it need not be concealed," ſaid Lord Denmore. I ſunk into a chair; and the blood ſeemed to freeze about my heart.

"The world is full of falſehood," continued Mrs. Sewell: "for a report was conveyed, by a letter to the Ducheſs, that Miſs St. Leger, after poiſoning Lady Denmore, had ſhot Mr. Treville, and abſconded."

I ſhrieked, and fell upon the carpet. My guardian ſtood aghaſt, and almoſt petrified with horror. I raiſed myſelf

upon my knees, and, ſnatching his hand, looked wildly round me. "Hide me!" ſaid I, "oh! hide me from the world for ever!"

"Is this true, Gertrude?" inquired Lord Denmore with a tone of voice terribly ſtern.

I was convulſed, and faulteringly anſwered, "In ſome degree I am guilty."

Lord Denmore ſnatched his piſtols, which the ſervant had placed upon the table, and pointed one at my head, the other at his own. Mrs. Sewell ruſhed between us, and, ſhrieking violently, held his arm. The ſervants flew to her aſſiſtance; while my guardian darted from the ſcene of frenzy, entered his chaiſe, and was out of ſight in a few moments.

Mrs. Sewell now deſired every perſon, excepting myſelf, to quit the room. Her requeſt being complied with, ſhe conjured me to confeſs, whether or not there

there was any truth in the terrible report that had been conveyed to the Ducheſs of Aldborough by an anonymous letter, which at the ſame moment ſhe preſented to me. I opened it, and, ſcarcely in my ſenſes, read as follows:

'Lady Denmore owed her death to 'the jealouſy of Gertrude St. Leger: 'and Mr. Treville has received a piſtol-'ſhot from the ſame deſperate aſſaſſin, 'of which he now languiſhes, without 'hopes of recovery.'

I inſtantly knew the hand-writing: it was the ſame as that of the letter which I received from Sir Hector Upas, wherein he confeſſed the truſty Scamper to have been his amanuenſis. My apprehenſions were of the moſt dreadful nature; a public trial, an ignominious death, a name branded with eternal infamy.

I aſſured Mrs. Sewell, that I was innocent of every accuſation reſpecting

Lady

Lady Denmore; that my days were drawing faſt to a concluſion; and that perhaps, when I ſhould be eternally at reſt, my innocence would be proved, and my fate lamented. Impreſſed by my ſorrow, and ſoftened by my tears, ſhe conjured me not to hazard a proof of ſo important an event.

"If you have been in the ſmalleſt degree culpable, the world will ſuppoſe you entirely guilty. I therefore adviſe you to fly from the danger that menaces, and to conceal yourſelf till the ſtory has ſunk into oblivion." Theſe were her words.

"Whither ſhall I go?" ſaid I.

Mrs. Sewell was evidently thoughtful during ſeveral minutes. Then reſuming the converſation, "I wiſh to reſcue you from the peril that awaits you," ſaid ſhe. "The Ducheſs, in her laſt moments, lamented that you did not obey her ſummons: ſhe ſcarcely credited the ſtory of your

your guilt; requeſted that I would inveſtigate the buſineſs; and, if you are proved innocent of the charge, her ſolicitor had orders to pay you a conſiderable legacy, which Lady Denmore, by a letter to her Grace, bequeathed to you. I therefore adviſe you this night to quit London. I have a relation, who reſides on the borders of the New Foreſt; at whoſe houſe, by changing your name, you may reſide with ſafety. In the mean time, I will take every ſtep to diſcover the writer of the anonymous letter, and to bring him to a confeſſion of his motive for propagating ſo vile a calumny. You ſhall hear from me by every poſt; and nothing but a full conviction of your criminality ſhall compel me to forſake you."

I readily aſſented to her propoſal; and in leſs than an hour we ſet out from Portman-ſquare, to take a place in the

the ſtage-coach for Hampſhire. As we proceeded towards Charing-croſs, Mrs. Sewell lamented my diſaſtrous fate, and repeated to me many kind expreſſions which the Ducheſs had uttered only a few hours before her death. The idea that ſhe did not believe me capable of a deed ſo atrocious in ſome meaſure conſoled my affliction; and after receiving a letter of introduction to Mrs. Sewell's relation, and thanking her for the kindneſs ſhe had ſhewn towards me, a place in the coach being fortunately vacant, I ſet out for the New Foreſt.

Nothing of importance occurred during my journey. The place of my deſtination was a farm-houſe, of which Mrs. Sewell's couſin was the maſter. The letter, which was my paſſport, preſented me as a Miſs Beauclerk, the daughter of a deceaſed clergyman; who having left me a ſmall independ-

ence,

ence, had enabled me to board in the country, and, with economy, to live reſpectably.

Mr. Aſhgrove received me with a frank welcome, which was both new and pleaſing. He was one of thoſe blunt ſons of Britain, whoſe ardent anceſtry had maintained that freedom which is more ennobling than either birth or fortune, by their integrity and valour. The farm had originally been a manor-houſe, and the abode of the Aſhgrove family during more than three centuries. Its preſent poſſeſſor was a widower, with one ſon and one daughter; the former a lieutenant in the navy, then on ſervice; and the latter at home, the governeſs of the family.

Notwithſtanding it was the hour of breakfaſt at the farm-houſe when the ſtage-coach ſet me down, I ſhortly after, having received the ruſtic civi-

lities

lities of the family, begged Miſs Mary Aſhgrove to inform me where my chamber was ſituated, in order that I might endeavour to ſleep away the fatigue of my nocturnal journey.

"Aye; ſhew Miſſey her room," ſaid the farmer: "for I ſuppoſe ſhe never gets up till mid-day, and will not dine till our folks are at ſupper. But," added he, "you ſhall not go to ſleep without taking ſomething, for you look but poorly notwithſtanding your good-nature." I ſmiled, and readily partook of the breakfaſt; for I was faint for want of both reſt and refreſhment.

On returning to my chamber I felt inclined to ſleep, even amidſt all my mental agonies; the perpetual anxiety of my mind during ſeveral preceding days now required that reſt without which exiſtence could not have been long ſupported. Indeed, Frances, I had ſo repeatedly ſhrunk beneath the ſeve-

rities

rities of my fate, that the fine nerve of feeling, which throbs within the human heart, was rendered leſs acutely ſenſible either of pain or pleaſure, than it had been at no diſtant period of my life. A few ſhort months had chilled the mind; and, as all mortal ſenſation exiſts in the power of imagination only, I prepared to meet my griefs by that apathy which could alone enable me to reſiſt them. Adieu, Frances. I truſt and hope that ſome propitious event will ſhortly terminate my ſorrows, or that Heaven, in pity to the anguiſh they occaſion, will cloſe the ſcene for ever.

LETTER LV.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, Dec. 25, 1796.

I HAVE this inſtant received three lines from Mrs. Sewell, informing me that ſhe has heard from unqueſtionable authority of Mr. Treville's convaleſcence. I breathe once more: I am once more ſuſtained by the flattering hope that Lord Denmore will be convinced of my innocence. I have ventured to write him a long explanatory letter, and I await the anſwer with undeſcribable impatience.

You ſhall hear from me the inſtant I receive it. Till then, adieu.

LETTER LVI.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, Dec. 27, 1796.

I HAVE been three days in my new habitation; during two of which I have ſtruggled to reſiſt the fever which burns in every vein, and menaces a ſpeedy termination of all my anxieties. I now remember the prediction of Mrs. Pew's phyſician: the infection rages in my boſom—my brain is agonized—I am feeble and ſubdued.

A languid ſickneſs overpowers me. Oh! ſpirits of my departed parents! ſoon, perhaps very ſoon, we ſhall meet in happier regions! I cannot hold my pen.—Adieu! adieu!

LETTER LVII.

The Same to the Same.

Dec. 28, 1796.

I HAVE paſſed a night of ſad and incoherent thoughts. I am yet ſenſible of my danger, though not anxious to remove it. How terrible muſt death appear to thoſe who are happy! How ſoothing is its approach to the unfortunate!

If I periſh, to you, Frances, I bequeath the ſtory of my fate; to you I commit the important taſk of developing the myſtery which ſeems to mark it. I am calm at this perilous moment; I ſhudder not, while the grave yawns to receive me.

The honeſt and ſimple inhabitants of this hoſpitable manſion are indefatigable

in their attentions to every thing that may preſent a chance of alleviating my ſufferings. All of medical art is eſſayed to reſtore me; but where is that power which can tranquiliize my feelings? I may truly ſay to thoſe who would relieve me—

"Can'ſt thou not miniſter to a MIND diſeaſed,
"Pluck from the memory a rooted ſorrow?
"Raſe out the written troubles of the brain?
"And, with ſome ſweet oblivious antidote,
"Cleanſe the foul boſom of that perilous ſtuff
"Which weighs upon the heart?"

I am forbid to write, but I ſteal a moment when it is ſuppoſed I ſleep, to ſay how reſigned I am to the proſpect of annihilation. Ah, Frances! if, at this moment, Lord Denmore could behold me, would he not forgive, would he not revive me by the ſympathy of friendſhip? If I ſurvive, the felicity of exiſtence will depend on his returning kindneſs.

kindneſs. If I expire, I go to meet my parents!

To-morrow will preſent the criſis of my diſorder. I await it without one thought that bears the ſmalleſt ſymptom of apprehenſion. I will not even entertain the flatterer Hope; I will inſpire my ſoul with that ſerene confidence, which will teach me to anticipate new and eternal ſcenes of happineſs!

I have yet received no anſwer from Lord Denmore: ſurely the bed of ſickneſs ought to be the oblivion of reſentment; but he believes me guilty; —guilty of murder! I ſhudder! Farewell.

LETTER LVIII.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, Dec. 30, 1796.

THE criſis is paſt, and I once more look forward to a prolonged exiſtence. Alas, Frances! I feel no delight in the proſpect of recovery; my days are devoted to ſadneſs; my hopes are for ever darkened by deſpair: to live and to know that I have loſt the eſteem, the affection of Lord Denmore, is but to linger out my hours in anguiſh. Would not annihilation be preferable? Am I not lengthening the tangled thread of fate to find it every moment more perplexing?

Would to Heaven I had been born in ſome wild uncultivated ſoil, whoſe inha-

bitants were the children of unſophiſti-cated nature! I might then have eſ-caped the ſpells of ſubtle machinations; I might have found ſome kind congenial ſpirit, whoſe mind was not polluted by the world's deceptions; and whoſe heart, though unrefined by the myſteries of falſe enjoyment, would have throbbed in uniſon with mine, or have ſympa-thized in all its feelings. I ſhould then have had no occaſion to diſſemble; I ſhould have had no cauſe to fear deceit. Neceſſity would not have pro-pelled me on to error, neither would the affections of my heart have under-mined the repoſe of my exiſtence. Frances, what am I now? A being perpetually forced to act a part at which my ſoul ſhivers with compunction: a wretch, cheriſhing an hopeleſs paſ-ſion; feeding, by my tears, a deſtruc-tive flame which every day and hour, by ſlow degrees, conſumes me. I feel that

I ſhall

I ſhall never ceaſe to love Lord Denmore; at the ſame moment I know, by ſure and fatal conviction, that my affection is unrequited. When I behold him my cheek glows, my pulſes beat more quick, my heart throbs convulſively, all objects grow dim before my eyes, and I ſeem to loſe the powers of diſcrimination. When he ſpeaks, I ſtart as from a reverie; when he is ſilent a gloomy horror overwhelms my ſenſes. With him I am inconſiſtently changeable; I am out of humour with my deſtiny; by turns, penſive, melancholy, wildly gay, and capriciouſly ſevere; I find fault with every thing; I am pleaſed with nothing. Something like witchery faſtens on my faculties; perverts my mind, diſpleaſes, yet abſorbs me; I wiſh perpetually to be any thing but what I am; I envy even the moſt unhappy; ſuppoſing that no earthly miſery can equal that of loving ſuch a mortal as Lord Denmore.

There are many traits of his character which my ſober reaſon ſhould condemn. He is raſh, impetuous, obſtinate in his opinions, prone to prejudice, ſevere in his reſentments, and uncandid in his conduct towards me. Whenever my heart endeavours to ſhake off the faſcination which holds it, he faſtens the chain more ſecurely by ſome kind and ſoothing attention; a look, a ſigh, a word, will at any time counteract the power of reflection, and deceive that heart which is the ſlave of his dominion. But ah, Frances! how does he employ the influence he has obtained? Alas! by the moſt ſevere injunctions; the moſt chilling reproaches; the indifference of a brother; the authority of a preceptor. He warms my boſom with the glow of gratitude, merely to freeze it again with the inſult of apathy. His looks are impreſſively tender; his words rigidly ſevere. He ſmiles like the morning ſplendour; he frowns

frowns like the overwhelming ſtorm. What a fool is woman while labouring under the influence of her ſenſes! How uſeleſs is reaſon; how feeble the reſiſting faculties of her mind, when the ſtormy paſſions faſten on her ſoul! O, Frances! to the frigid boſom, theſe reflections are inexplicable. There are beings whoſe hearts are formed of that adamantine compound which reſiſts the force of ſenſibility; who condemn, with faſtidious ſcorn, the errors of the feeling breaſt, as though they were ſubjected to our own dominion. Who would be the voluntary ſlave of paſſion? Who would, by inclination, cheriſh that poiſon which is ſure to contaminate the very ſource of happineſs? The queſtion is eaſily anſwered; it requires no ſophiſtry; the eloquence of nature will in a moment ſolve it.—Adieu.

LETTER LIX.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, Dec. 31, 1796.

I HAVE yet received no anſwer from my guardian; and a letter, which I alſo wrote to Mr. Pew, remains unnoticed. Neglected by thoſe whom I reſpect and love, the world now becomes a dreary ſolitude. I look around me for conſolation, and, amidſt the ever-varying ſcenes of life, I find no friend to ſolace, no kindred to protect me. Why then do I live?

In this tranquil retreat, this home of unartificial enjoyments, I might be happy, were my heart as tranquil as my conſcience. But alas, Frances! innocence will not always inſure felicity; nor does the ſerene guardian of an uncontaminated

contaminated ſpirit always ſcatter the balm of repoſe round the pillow where it ſlumbers.

Oh, Frances! how terrible, how prophetic are the dreams that haunt me! What hideous viſions hover over and menace me, almoſt to the annihilation of reaſon. Laſt night, in fancy, but, ah! how like was it to reality, I beheld my mother, pale, and ſternly frowning on me. Her boſom was ſtained with blood, her eyes fixed and hollow; her lip wan as the livid paleneſs of her cheeks; her form tranſparent, and her hand cold as the icicle.

She approached my pillow; I ſtretched forth my arms to embrace her: ſhe faintly ſmiled, ſighed deeply, waved her hand, and vaniſhed. I awoke fevered with agitation. The moon ſhone upon my bed. I trembled: I felt the cold drops ſtarting from my forehead. The image of my angelic parent ſeemed ſtill

preſent, looking wiſtfully and tenderly upon me.

Again I cloſed my eyes: again, Frances, I ſlept. The next dreadful phantom which tortured my viſionary moments of repoſe was the image of Lord Denmore. He approached me; and, with a voice which ſeemed as though it iſſued from a ſepulchre, he exclaimed, "Raſh Gertrude! the thorn you cheriſh in your boſom will deſtroy you. By its deſtructive influence your parents periſhed." A ſecond time I ſtarted from my ſlumber, fearful and aghaſt. The ſun had riſen, and my chamber was enlivened by its luſtre. I aroſe to write this letter, and to aſſure you, that I have now no conſolation but in your friendſhip.

LETTER LX.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, Jan. 2, 1797.

I HAVE been juſt three weeks the inmate of Mr. Aſhgrove's manſion; the aſſociate of beings whoſe minds are unpolluted by the refinements of diſſipation, and whoſe hearts ſtill own the ſpring of philanthropy, becauſe they have never been taught to feel the pang of diſappointed hope. Frances, it is the vice of individuals that contaminates the million: and that mortal who has felt the acute anguiſh of regret, the ſting of ingratitude, the ſickening loathing of diſguſt, the pain of inſulted friendſhip, and the ſelf-reproof of miſtaken credulity, is leſs diſpoſed to the love of humankind, than he who has moved on the

ſmooth path of humble virtue, far from the buſy din of care, and a ſtranger to the myſteries of refined diſſimulation.

Our family party was yeſterday augmented by the arrival of Edward Aſhgrove. The young ſailor is the inheritor of that frank, unaffected manner, which ſo ſtrikingly characterizes his father. He is only three-and-twenty years of age; brave, amiable, and handſome. With a countenance animated by good-nature, and a form embelliſhed by native graces, this ſon of the rude waves bleſſes the abode of his anceſtors; and, by hereditary virtues, ſets all adventitious claims far, very far beneath him.

Every aſſiduity has been eſſayed to reſtore my health, and to renovate my ſpirits; but the calm hour of mental repoſe is paſt for ever; and I am henceforth deſtined, while I tread on thorns, to behold all the ſweeteſt flowers of fancy

fancy fade before me. Frances, have I not reaſon to repine, while I am doomed to lament the premature decay of thoſe fair hopes which ſhould exhilarate the mind of youth, even before the ſummer of my days begins to brighten?

The amiable object of attraction, which preſides in this ruſtic abode of tranquillity, and whom I mentioned in one of my former letters, is juſt three years younger than Edward, who, with the ſtronger traits of maſculine beauty, is the counterpart of his ſiſter. They are the moſt intereſting beings, excepting only two, that ever I have met with. I need not remind you, that there are ſuch mortals as Frances Montgomery and Lord Denmore.

The lovely Mary Aſhgrove is the unrivalled *belle* of the New Foreſt: her perſon is ſmall, her complexion dark, her manners gentle, and her mind ro-

mantic. Yet there is ſomething of the rural coquette in her demeanour, which gives her, to thoſe who are diſpoſed to condemn, an appearance of affectation. You will perhaps be aſtoniſhed at this deſcription: but your ſurpriſe will ceaſe, when I tell you that the pretty Mary has lived, during ſome time, in the great world; having paſſed ſeveral months laſt winter with her relation, Mrs. Sewell, at the Ducheſs of Aldborough's.

I have obſerved, ſince my reſidence here, that at times Miſs Aſhgrove's mind ſeems to labour under a depreſſion, which intereſts, and excites curioſity. She is penſive, and ſometimes melancholy. Her health viſibly declines; and ſhe often commences a converſation as if to unfold the cauſe of her inquietude, and then, as though ſhe wanted confidence in my friendſhip, ſuddenly changes the ſubject. I already lament,

though

though I am a ſtranger to the ſource of her uneaſineſs: for that ſhe is a woman is a ſufficient cauſe why I ſhould ſympathize in her ſorrows. Too well I know, Frances, that we are the victims of our own ſenſibility; the dupes of that artifice which neither wiſdom nor experience can teach us to counteract, when once our reaſon becomes ſubſervient to our ſenſes.

You tell me that you are preparing for a long tour to a diſtant part of Ireland. It will therefore be uſeleſs to write again till your arrival in Dublin. Let me know the period of your return; for moſt probably I ſhall have many events to communicate, many ſorrows to encounter, before I again ſubſcribe myſelf affectionately yours.

LETTER LXI.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, March 2, 1797.

My prophetic heart moſt truly anticipated the events which menaced its repoſe; and I have, ſince I wrote my laſt letter, experienced a variety of ſenſations, almoſt too numerous to be delineated. But memory is ever faithful to paſt ſorrows; though the wandering fancy roves from ſcene to ſcene, when pleaſure leads it, forgetful of thoſe joys that fade away, and only conſcious of the preſent moment. Such varying emotions influence the mind, where the heart is untouched and careleſs. But there ſtill exiſts one paſſion, whoſe power no change of ſcene can vanquiſh; a paſſion fixed in the human breaſt, at once

once its torment and its ſource of happineſs; its balm, and its deſtruction.

The amiable manners, the vivid ſenſibility, and the ardent mind of Edward Aſhgrove, would charm, even to faſcination, any being leſs unhappy than your ill-fated Gertrude. Alas, Frances! dare I confeſs to you that I have, almoſt unconſciouſly, excited an intereſt in his mind, which he has obliquely ventured to unfold; while I ſhrunk under the ſelf-reproof of a deception, which rendered me unworthy of his notice. I am here, an artificial character: my real name, connections, ſituation, birth, and fortune, unknown to thoſe who hoſpitably ſhelter me. They conſider me as one, whoſe income, though contracted, is yet independent; while I feel, and my heart aches at the ſenſation, that I have no hope but in the bounty of a ſtern, capricious mortal, whom I

love too tenderly to offend, and whoſe ſeverity is equal to my affection.

Miſs Aſhgrove has honoured me with her confidence; and the frank confeſſion of her heart has elucidated its myſterious inquietude. She is ardently attached to one who, by the moſt zealous profeſſions of regard, obtained her promiſe of inviolable faith; but who, from a variety of motives, has been obliged to protract their union till the enſuing autumn. An abſence of five months, and a total ſilence on his part, has awakened fears which prey upon her repoſe; and unleſs ſome change takes place in her mind, or in the conduct of her lover, the moſt fatal conſequences may be apprehended.

Thus far am I acquainted with her ſtory; though, for reaſons which ſhe will not declare, I am yet a ſtranger to the name and ſituation of her promiſed huſband.

huſband. The gallant Edward, whoſe mind is all animation, frequently rallies his ſiſter on her evident deſpondency; laughs at the romantic ſolicitude of love; and commends my conduct as the criterion of propriety. Ah! my friend, how little does he know me.

I have received a letter from Mrs. Sewell, encloſing Mr. Pew's anſwer which informs me that his amiable helpmate is perfectly recovered. She alſo acquaints me, that Lord Denmore has not viſited the Caſtle ſince my departure; and that Mr. Treville, perfectly reſtored to health, has quitted London. The place of my guardian's reſidence, or rather ſecluſion, is unknown to his family: I truſt in Heaven, that he is happy; forgetful of my fate, though not by me forgotten.

How unjuſtly am I deſerted; how unkindly left to wander over the wide world, unfriended, and expoſed to every misfortune.

misfortune. I confeſs that I have made every effort to be pleaſed with Mr. Aſhgrove's attentions, with the hope that, by their ſoothing influence, I ſhall in a leſs degree feel the neglect of Lord Denmore. There are moments when my heart, warmed by emotions of gratitude and eſteem, ſeems lightened of its burthen. I ſmile, I liſten to the wild language of this child of nature; and every word he utters bears an attractive grace, becauſe it is dictated by truth, and ſanctioned by diſcretion. But the pleaſing period of deluſion is tranſient; my ſenſes, indelibly impreſſed, relapſe into their habitual ſadneſs; and the momentary revolution paſſes away, like the ſunbeams over a dark and ſtormy ocean.

The unaccountable ſecluſion of Lord Denmore excites my curioſity, and agitates my reaſon. I indulge the chimeras of an unquiet fancy, till they lead me beyond the limits of truth and probability.

bility. How creative is the ſickening mind! how eagerly does it cheriſh the moſt diſtorted ideas! and with what avidity does it traverſe ſcenes, which are fraught with viſionary horrors. The deep ſhades of theſe romantic haunts are little calculated to diſſipate the magic of ſuperſtition. Solitude feeds the ſlow poiſon of melancholy; and the ſtillneſs of retirement is but a feeble antidote for the wild tumults of a ſoul labouring to reſiſt the encroachments of deſpair. Let that being who would cure the fever of deſpondency ſeek the tumultuous din of cities, the buſy varying paths of life; ſmile with the thoughtleſs, revel with the gay; and, by ſporting with the ſhadows of delight, ſhake from the overburthened mind the realities of ſorrow. Sequeſtration will augment inquietude to madneſs. Why then do I court the evil that will deſtroy me? Adieu.

LETTER LXII.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, March 6, 1797.

I HAVE yet received no intelligence reſpecting Lord Denmore. How ſickening is the diſappointment of hope; how humiliating the neglect of thoſe in whom we treaſure up our happineſs! What fools are women, while under the dominion of their affections; and how poignant is the regret for the follies we commit during the delirium of our ſenſes, when reflection returns to calm their perturbation!

My pride begins to fortify my reaſon. Neglected, and treated with contemptuous ſilence, I will endeavour to ſubdue the agitation of my mind: I will examine my heart; and if there yet exiſts one

one virtue, one nerve, that is capable of repelling the preſſure of unmerited inſult, it ſhall be exerted with energy. Perpetual contempt will cure the anguiſh of regret; the humiliations of ſcorn will rouſe the ſoul to the ſtrongeſt effort of reſiſting fortitude: and the hatred which follows the triumph of reaſon over the paſſions, is no leſs terrible than their deſpair.

Mr. Aſhgrove's attentions are unremitting. His mind is noble and ingenuous; his manners frank and faſcinating. Frances, he has avowed his affection. He has offered marriage. How perplexing is my ſituation; how fatiguing is the leſſon of hypocriſy, which I am condemned to practiſe. I cannot, I will not deceive ſo amiable a mortal; and, ſmarting beneath the ſeverity of my fate, piqued by the neglect of Lord Denmore, I ſcarcely dare

dare truſt my fortitude. I know how any other woman would act under ſuch circumſtances; and yet I have not courage to decide.

LETTER LXIII.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, March 11, 1797.

I LAMENT, while I perceive that Miſs Aſhgrove's health declines hourly. She is fading faſt towards the grave. She is the victim of ſenſibility.

While I contemplate her pale and altered countenance, her feeble frame, her hollow languid eyes, Fancy recalls the image of Lady Denmore; and my heart ſeems to ſhudder at her deſtiny. Though raſh and erroneous in the laſt moments

moments of her life, yet Pity gives a tear to conſecrate her ſorrows. Perhaps the ſtern, the frigid mind of Lord Denmore precipitated her from happineſs to an early grave. Alas, Frances! I feel, too ſenſibly I feel, that he has power to agitate, to wound, to humble, to afflict: and where is the female heart which is proof againſt ſuch provocation?

I begin to pity that being whoſe fate has ſubjected her to the tyranny of a deſpot: and I know, by all the agonies which my conſcious heart has felt, that the ſucceſſor of neglected love is indignation; in ardent and deſpairing minds, revenge.

O, Frances! what a train of horrors paſs ſwiftly through my brain! How various, and how terrific are the conflicts of my ſoul, whenever the pride of reſentment maſters the influence of affection. Should I not be more tranquil, were Lord Denmore in his grave?

Would

Would not the certainty that he could never be the huſband of another, that hope was for ever loſt, and my deſtiny decided, be preferable to this perpetual ſolicitude, this never-reſting torment, this mental hell, which inceſſantly burns within my brain, and agonizes it to frenzy?

I will ſee Lord Denmore; I will once more ſee him, to tell him how juſtly I reſent his conduct; how indignantly I feel the magnitude of his unkindneſs. Yes; I will traverſe the habitable globe to find that being who has rendered every part of it to me a ſcene of ſorrow.

LETTER LXIV.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, April 14th, 1797.

I AM hourly perplexed with importunities from Mr. Aſhgrove; he knows not the cauſe of my heſitation, for I have not decidedly refuſed his propoſals; but he places the bluſhing reſerve which marks my confuſion to the account of timid and delicate reflection. I muſt ſhortly be explicit; I cannot long ſuſtain this double character, this tacit deception which perpetually tortures my exiſtence with remorſe and agitation. I have frequently reſolved on developing the myſtery; on placing that confidence in his ſecrecy and honour, which is the bond of friendſhip and baſis of eſteem.

I do not love Mr. Aſhgrove; I am not blinded by his flattering partiality; neither am I dazzled by the luſtre of his worth. I ſcarcely know whether I ſhould be tranquil as his wife; happineſs I do not ſeek for on this ſide the grave; and yet I have not reſolution to refuſe him. Dare I confeſs that I ſhould almoſt be tempted to beſtow my hand, merely with the hope that ſuch a ſtep might pique the proud, the capricious Lord Denmore. Perhaps when he found my heart irretrievably loſt, his would be agonized by compunction: and ah, Frances! how gratifying to my ſoul would that hour, that anguiſh prove, which ſhould, by a juſt retaliation, puniſh ſuch an apoſtate.

That Lord Denmore once loved me is unqueſtionable. His words, his looks, his actions, were all the evidences of a fond and undiſguiſed attachment. Even his reſentments were marked with

with affection; for we ſeldom take the trouble to condemn, where we are indifferent to the object. Why he has changed his opinions, his ſentiments, I am at a loſs to diſcover: I have been blamable in ſome inſtances, but nothing like criminality has yet been proved againſt me. Then why, why am I condemned, without the power to plead an extenuation of my conduct?

The calm reflections of retirement, to minds congenially tranquil, are pleaſing even to felicity: but I, who know no happineſs, who linger out exiſtence in one dream of mournful ruminations, can taſte no joy, can feel no delight, however faſcinating the object, or luxurious the ſcenery with which I am ſurrounded. At the cloſe of every evening, when the ſultry hours are ſucceeded by the repoſe of twilight, it has been our cuſtom theſe laſt five weeks to wander about the foreſt, and to viſit

the variety of cottages which ſkirt the vicinity of our home. Miſs Aſhgrove, whoſe mind is all ſenſibility, whoſe heart is all benevolence, never fails to ſmile with the cheerful, and to beſtow a tear when ſhe hears the ſigh of the unfortunate.

Four evenings ſince, as Mr. Aſhgrove and myſelf were going to meet his ſiſter who had been to viſit a ſick cottager, by the ſide of a thick underwood which covered a gentle acclivity near the moſt romantic part of the foreſt, on a ſudden we were ſtartled by the ſhrieks of a female; the ſun had ſet ſome time, and the duſky haze of twilight ſcarcely rendered our path viſible. We proceeded ſlow, and liſtened; again the ſhriek was repeated. Mr. Aſhgrove haſtily drew his arm from mine, and without uttering a ſyllable, darted towards the ſpot from whence the terrifying ſound proceeded.

Frances,

Frances, a ſenſation of alarm, and intereſt for his ſafety, unfelt before, at that moment poſſeſſed my boſom; I ruſhed after him; and, with all the energy of ſolicitude, entreated him not to leave me. My evident diſtreſs and agitation for a moment arreſted his footſteps; but a repetition of the heart-penetrating tone arouſed his ſenſibility, and tearing himſelf from my hold, he ruſhed to the thickeſt part of the foreſt.

The darkneſs of the hour was conſiderably augmented by the over-arching branches of the trees; and I heard him breaking through the interwoven path, ſome minutes after I had entirely loſt ſight of him. My fears augmented every inſtant, till my ear faintly diſtinguiſhed a kind of ruſtling as though two perſons were engaged in combat. But how ſhall I deſcribe my horror when the report of a piſtol echoed

among the underwood, and preſently after I beheld Mr. Aſhgrove, bearing in his arms his ſiſter, who had fainted, and was wholly inſenſible.

The report of the piſtol ſoon brought ſeveral perſons to the ſpot; all of whom eagerly inquired the cauſe of ſo unuſual an alarm. Miſs Aſhgrove in a ſhort time revived, and claſping her brother in her arms, exclaimed, "Thank Heaven! you are ſafe;" then as ſuddenly recollecting herſelf ſhe added, burſting into tears, "I truſt and hope you have not killed him, Edward."

"No; the monſter has eſcaped," ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove; "but I have marked him at leaſt; for having no weapon of defence but a ſtout bit of oak, I was not ſparing of it, believe me."

"I am ſorry for it," ſighed Miſs Aſhgrove. "Raſh and unworthy as he is, Heaven knows that I wiſh him no evil."

"Then

"Then he ſhould have ſheared off quietly," replied the gallant Edward: "for an Engliſhman is not one of that ſort who will tamely receive the ſhot of an enemy. But what is the ſneaking pitiful raſcal who would pervert the deſign of nature, and inſult that ſex which he was born to idolize? I'll be damned if he is a ſailor."

"We will return home," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove, riſing from the bank where her brother had ſeated her, and where he ſtill knelt to ſupport her: "I feel myſelf very much recovered, and can walk with your aſſiſtance." She proceeded along the path with tottering ſteps. I held one of her arms, Edward the other, till we arrived at the farm-houſe.

The domeſtics were alarmed at our appearance, and their fears were augmented when they beheld Miſs Aſhgrove pale and languid, while the

guardian of her honour was covered with blood. Their father's conſternation was evident. A thouſand queſtions were aſked; all of which increaſed the agitation viſible in Mary's countenance and manner. Still ſhe endeavoured to divert their thoughts from the object who had committed the outrage, to him who ſtood careleſs of his appearance repeating all that had happened.

"We will find the rogue if he is above ground," ſaid the farmer. Then turning to the gaping crowd of peaſants who had followed us, and who ſtood liſtening with mute aſtoniſhment, he added, "Why, you louts! for what do you ſtand ſtar-gazing, while the foreſt is infeſted with thieves and murderers? arm yourſelves, and out, one and all; and ſhew us by a turn or two, how you will beat the French when they pay us a viſit."

This

This taunt ſeemed to electrify the whole circle. The room was cleared in an inſtant, and Edward ruſhing after them, ſwore that they ſhould only make the attack one by one; exclaiming, "May he be beaten who would take an unfair advantage, even of an enemy."

In a few minutes, more than twenty ſtout fellows entered the hall, armed moſt formidably, and panting to give battle. One ſwore that he would die rather than ſurrender; another that he would ſhew the French what it was to attack an Engliſhman on his own ground; while a third ſeemed to glow with that heroic ardour, which, animating the Genius of the waves that guard our iſland, diffuſes its influence through every Britiſh boſom!

The comments of the hardy and no leſs valiant troops, were prolonged by the trembling Mary, who aſked many queſtions, and ſupplied the whole circle

with ale, as ſhe ſaid, to reward their zeal, but, as I plainly perceived, to protract the moment of their departure, thereby favouring the eſcape of the daſtardly delinquent. The ſimple father, unconſcious of her motive, addreſſed the group, wiſhing them ſucceſs in their undertaking, and promiſing the ſum of ten pounds to the hero who ſhould make the offender his priſoner. This offer was received with three cheers, and again the ſons of labour ſallied forth, while poor Mary ſighed as ſhe bade them remember, that "to forgive an enemy, was nobler than to deſtroy him."

She retired to her chamber, whither I followed her. A torrent of tears for a time prevented her power of ſpeaking; but after a ſtruggle of agitation, while hope, fear, and reſentment mingled in her boſom, ſhe took my hand and confeſſed the cauſe of her anxiety.

"What

"What beings are women!" ſaid ſhe. "What ſtrangely organized beings! Will you not wonder when I tell you that my heart is tortured with apprehenſion for the fate even of the wretch who would have deſtroyed my happineſs, by depriving me of that honour which I value more than exiſtence?"

I knew not how to anſwer her. She pauſed a few moments, and then continued:

"This hour has ſealed my deſtiny. The inſult which I have received will terminate my hopes for ever. For though I truſt that he will eſcape from his purſuers; though I ſhudder while I reflect on the peril to which a brother has been expoſed in my defence, I ſhall never ceaſe to love—" She was again interrupted by her tears.

"Time will give ſtrength to your indignation, and teach you to abhor a wretch ſo baſe and cowardly!" ſaid I.

"I doubt it," replied Miſs Aſhgrove. "I learnt to pay devotion, before I found that my idol was a falſe one; and even with all his faults, his vices, I cannot abandon that which I have ſo zealouſly, ſo fondly worſhipped."

"Where we have idolized through error, reaſon will ſanction our apoſtaſy," ſaid I. "Indeed there are ſituations in which our faith becomes criminal, our zeal diſgraceful."

"That may be true," anſwered Miſs Aſhgrove: "but reaſon muſt ſubdue the force of affection, before we can have ſtrength to own ſuch a converſion."

"Do you ſuppoſe that the object may be reformed?" ſaid I. "Will reflection convince him of his folly, and teach him to deſerve you by the ſincerity of his repentance?"

"Never,"

"Never," replied Mary: "his mind is too depraved even for my forgiveneſs to reform it. Practiſed in every art, he does not even try the power of rectitude over thoſe whom he would vanquiſh."

"Perhaps he fears that the practice of virtue would, in him, appear like hypocriſy," ſaid I: "for there are men who are ſo accuſtomed to deceive, that even truth would in them be queſtioned, and the ſemblance of honour ſeem but a more refined ſpecies of deception."

"Such is the unworthy Somerton," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove. She inſtantly checked herſelf, and was nearly overwhelmed with confuſion. "You have now, by my inadvertency, diſcovered the name of the being who rules my deſtiny: I conjure you to be ſecret," ſaid ſhe, taking my hand and trembling with agitation.—We had paſſed two hours in converſing, and in forming conjectures

jectures reſpecting the eſcape of Mary's lover, when Edward returned, and acquainted us that the party has obtained information, that ſhortly after he had reſcued his ſiſter from Somerton's violence, he had been ſeen entering a poſt-chaiſe with four horſes, which immediately ſet off towards London.

The effect which this extraordinary event has produced on Miſs Aſhgrove's mind may eaſily be imagined. She waſtes her days in deep and melancholy thought, her nights in tears. She hopes, ſhe fears, abhors, laments, and loves alternately! What is this childiſh, this unconquerable faſcination? What, but deſtiny?

I have not yet heard from Lord Denmore. In a few days I purpoſe ſetting out for the Caſtle. I have meditated; I will endeavour to ſtrengthen my mind, to ſee him once more, and then to bid him farewell for ever!

LETTER LXV.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, June 12, 1797.

FRANCES, juſt twelve months have paſſed ſince I quitted that beloved and tranquil home, where from my infancy I had enjoyed repoſe, which never can again be mine in this world of ſorrow. Never! oh! what a train of mournful reflections precede that definitive word! what boundleſs anxieties, what fears, what perturbations tremble in the boſom, even while it hopes for a termination of its pains, its ſenſibilities!

Twelve months ago I was the happieſt of mortals. Uninitiated in the mazy deceptions of this buſy world, I had no dread of future ills, no comprehenſion of the labyrinths which

would lead to that abyſs, where miſery only finds its remedy in death. I knew not that the worthleſs were the moſt favoured by fortune; that merit was frequently deſtined to pine in ſadneſs; that the liberal and ingenuous boſom was expoſed to the machinations of the cunning and the vicious, or that ingratitude in the ſcale of refined enjoyments was neither deemed criminal nor marked with the abhorrence of the exalted. However theſe contradictions may ſtartle the thinking mind, they are no leſs true than aſtoniſhing. I have ſeen the moſt amiable objects labouring up the path of fame, pelted by the ſtorms of adverſe fortune; I have heard the ſigh of neglected genius in the abode of poverty; I have ſympathiſed with the full breaking heart, while its poſſeſſor withered in ſilent anguiſh, perſecuted by the proud, and ſcorned by the unlettered. Ah, Frances! what

has

has been the contraſt! The vulgar and the ignorant have revelled in luxurious eaſe; triumphed with impunity in the exerciſe of oppreſſion; mocked the low, complaining voice of ſorrow; counſelled without the generoſity to ſuccour; and oſtentatiouſly commiſerated that being whom they ſhould have learnt to emulate. All this the children of genius are doomed to ſuffer; while the artful and the dull of ſoul enjoy their ſunny day, cheerful and unmoleſted.

Twelve months have paſſed away like a long and feveriſh dream. I have ſeen no proſpect of repoſe that has not vaniſhed; I have experienced no moment of delight which has not been embittered by ſucceeding anguiſh. I have found no friend who has not wounded my boſom; no protector who has not abandoned me to the ſeverities of fortune. When we are weary of the day's fatigue, we are permitted

to

to ſeek repoſe: when the pooreſt hind has finiſhed his allotted taſk, he throws himſelf on his pallet, and is revived by a refreſhing ſlumber. Yet if the world-weary ſoul quits this tumultuous, feveriſh ſcene of ſorrow, ſickened by the neglect of the unfeeling, or diſguſted by the unjuſt diſtributions of fortune's favours; if the fervour of an enlightened imagination cannot confine itſelf within the frigid barrier of reflecting fortitude, an emancipation is deemed criminal; even though that ſoul may quit its earthly habitation unſtained with guilt, and though neceſſity may tarniſh a prolonged exiſtence with every ſpecies of diſhonour. Frances, I have yet been an unoffending ſufferer; I have committed no crime againſt ſociety; I have not violated the laws of moral rectitude. If I live, to what perils ſhall I be expoſed; with no companion but poverty, no tutor but deſpair!

Lord

Lord Denmore lives: I ſhall probably behold him married to another. Shall I? Oh, never! never! Year after year has he taught me to look forward with delight: I have conſidered him as the ſource of every happineſs: I cannot teach myſelf tamely to relinquiſh thoſe hopes, while another ſhall behold them realized.

What am I writing? I am wild and frantic. Frances, the wonders of this vaſt and perpetually-revolving orb are not more various than my thoughts. One hour I hate Lord Denmore: my pride then towers above my tenderneſs, and I anticipate a viſionary ſcene of happineſs. The next, my ſoul relapſes into ſadneſs, and the affections of the heart triumph over all the claims of reaſon.

You will ſcarcely believe that it is poſſible to love and to hold in abhorrence the ſame object, and at the ſame moment.

moment. I know the certainty of ſuch a ſenſation: but I alſo know that it can only be experienced where the former had obtained dominion before the latter was nurſed into exiſtence. The mind is then ſo naturally prone to approve, ſo fearful to diſcover its diſappointment, that it cannot ſhake off its faſcination, though the object has ſunk beneath contempt or pity: and we would rather perſuade ourſelves that we diſcriminate too nicely, than that the idol of our devotions has diſgraced our judgment.

Mr. Aſhgrove, in his rencontre with the daſtardly Somerton, received a deep wound on the head, which he did not mention at the time; but which has ſince preſented the moſt alarming ſymptoms. He was confined to his chamber near a month, and, at periods, delirious. The anguiſh which poor Mary experienced was poignant; and I hoped that, in proportion as his danger impreſſed her

her mind, ſhe would learn to execrate the wretch who had attempted to deſtroy him. But her's was a divided ſorrow. She ſighed over the pillow of a dear ſuffering brother, while the tears of regret ſtole from her eyes for the unworthineſs of his aſſailant.

Yeſterday, for the firſt time ſince the adventure, the invalid was permitted to take the air on horſeback. Miſs Aſhgrove and myſelf accompanied him; and though I never before ventured to ride, I felt not the ſmalleſt degree of reluctance or apprehenſion. There are ſituations of mind which cannot be aſſailed by fear. The conſciouſneſs of peril ſubſides, when the boſom is rendered deſperate by repeated injuries; for

"Death ſhakes the happy;
"But he who is a wretch receives him gladly."

We

We viſited the wood where Edward had reſcued Mary from the inſults of a ruffian. The indignant ſpirit of his ſoul ſeemed to dart from his eyes, as he gazed intently on the path where he had encountered the villain; while I obſerved a ſudden paleneſs ſpreading itſelf over his ſiſter's cheek, which betrayed more of agitation than reſentment.

"Miſguided Somerton!" exclaimed the unhappy girl: "would to Heaven thou hadſt never viſited this ſpot!"

"You knew the coward then!" ſaid Edward with aſtoniſhment. Mary heaved a deep ſigh, and turned her horſe's head towards the entrance of the wood.

Mr. Aſhgrove now addreſſed me earneſtly. "What can ſhe mean?" continued he with augmented ſurpriſe. "I feel a kind of compunction ruſhing through my heart, which tells me that I have wounded a ſiſter's boſom, while I only meant to puniſh an aſſaſſin. If this

this coward Somerton was dear to Mary, if his conduct was ſanctioned by her imprudent confidence, or ſhe expoſed herſelf to brutal violence by a preconcerted aſſignation, I was only acting the part of a meddling fool, and ſhe little thanks me."

"Impoſſible!" ſaid I. "Whatever folly ſhe might have been guilty of, in relying on a libertine, your zeal was natural, your conduct laudable, and her gratitude muſt be unbounded."

"Were you in love with an unworthy object, would you eſteem that being who ſhould chaſtiſe his baſeneſs, or ſeparate you for ever from him?" ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove.

My cheek reddened at the queſtion: but after ſome heſitation I replied, "Unqueſtionably."

"Then I lament that Somerton was not your lover, inſtead of Mary's," added

added he, with a ſmile at once arch and impreſſive.

"You are not my brother," ſaid I: "the circumſtances are by no means ſimilar."

"No, thank Heaven!" exclaimed Edward; "for in that caſe I ſhould almoſt deſpair of making the experiment. I wiſh you would entertain a predilection for ſome unworthy mortal, merely to prove the ſincerity of my deſire to ſerve you." I was confuſed, and ſcarcely knew whither I was proceeding, when Miſs Aſhgrove reminded us that the day was cloſing faſt, and the damps of twilight riſing rapidly.

We continued our ride towards home, without another ſyllable being ſpoken. I know not what produced the aſſociation; but my thoughts, during the remainder of the night, perpetually dwelt on Lord Denmore

and

and Edward Aſhgrove. I confeſs, Frances, that I felt a daring ſpirit of reſentment ſtruggling with my affection; and that I fancied my inhuman guardian already *in his grave.*

Shudder not! The chimeras of a diſordered brain are fraught with horrors! Reflection will, I truſt, calm the perturbed imagination, and friendſhip ſooth its anguiſh with a tear of ſympathy.

LETTER LXVI.

The Same to the Same.

New Foreſt, June 14, 1797.

By advice of an eminent phyſician Miſs Aſhgrove ſets off to-morrow for Briſtol Wells. Her diſorder gives alarming ſymptoms of a rapid decline;

and, as it originates in mental inquietude, I fear her recovery is hopeleſs. She has requeſted that I will be the companion of her journey; and, under the protection of her brother, to-morrow morning we purpoſe quitting the New Foreſt.

Every hour my pride continues to fortify my heart againſt the neglect and injuſtice of Lord Denmore; and, in proportion as my indignant ſpirit augments in reſiſtance, the inquietudes of my thoughts appear to leſſen. Yet I am often induced to queſtion the fortitude to which reſentment gives birth. for the ever-varying diſpoſition of my mind promiſes little ſtability beyond the influence of the moment. One kind look or word from Lord Denmore, would prove how poorly I deſerve the name of a philoſopher.

On the continuance of his neglect, therefore, depend my hopes of future tranquillity:

tranquillity: and alas, Frances! the reliance is but too certain. He has armed his boſom with an adamantine ſhield of frozen indifference; more invulnerable than that of anger, and no leſs petrifying than that of death.

I will teach myſelf to think kindly of Edward Aſhgrove: the unremitting attentions of ſuch a being muſt in time ſecure the heart's affections. He has worth to command admiration; and I truſt, with all the inconſiſtencies of my mind, I have diſcrimination ſufficient to confeſs it. From Lord Denmore's friendſhip I have nothing to hope; from the honour and virtues of Edward Aſhgrove, I may expect repoſe, if not felicity. Adieu. You ſhall hear from me again very ſhortly: till then, my moſt affectionate wiſhes ſhall attend you.

LETTER LXVII.

The Same to the Same.

June 16, 1797.

YESTERDAY morning early we ſet out from the New Foreſt. Poor Mary endeavoured to aſſume a gaiety of manner which little accorded with the dejection of her heart, or the evident laſſitude of her frame. She dreaded the effect which the ceremony of taking leave would produce on the mind of her father, under the idea that the ſeparation might be final: therefore, with a vivacity of countenance which ſhe has long been unaccuſtomed to diſplay, ſhe embraced her family; while, half ſmiling through tears of tenderneſs and regret, ſhe bade them farewell, and departed.

We

We purpoſed paſſing through London in our way to Briſtol, Mr. Aſhgrove having buſineſs of importance to tranſact, and my inclinations alſo leading me to make a viſit of gratitude to my kind and amiable protectreſs Mrs. Sewell; to whoſe friendſhip I was indebted for the conſolations I had experienced during my reſidence in the New Foreſt.

On our arrival in London I deſired that we might immediately proceed to Portman-ſquare. This requeſt was readily complied with, Mrs. Sewell being no leſs a favourite with Miſs Aſhgrove than with myſelf; and Edward not having ſeen his amiable relation during the laſt four years. On ſtopping our chaiſe at the door, we found that the houſe was uninhabited, ſeveral workmen being buſily employed in repairing and embelliſhing every apartment. I inquired after Mrs. Sewell, but could obtain no information reſpecting her

preſent abode. I then found, by the queſtions which followed, that the Ducheſs of Aldborough had bequeathed her town-houſe to Lord Denmore, by whoſe order it was now repairing with the moſt uncommon ſplendour.

This intelligence aſtoniſhed me, while it gave birth to various conjectures. I thought it ſingularly ſtrange that a man of my guardian's meditative mind, a being who delighted in ſolitude, who contemned the follies of the world, abhorred its tumultuous ſcenes, had relinquiſhed a town reſidence during the life-time of Lady Denmore, and who, even when the hoſpitalities of the Caſtle required ſociability, was perpetually abſorbed in ſtudy, devoted to ſequeſtration; ſhould, at a period when events were rather calculated to diſguſt, than to give the feeling mind a zeſt for pleaſure, emancipate from mental occupations, and become a being of the world;

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an inhabitant of the gay and viſionary ſcene, where every ill, every ſpecies of anguiſh, lurked beneath the motley tinſel garb of faſhionable ſplendour. I could not comprehend a change ſo wonderful. I was perplexed and bewildered by the variety of ſuppoſitions which rapidly poſſeſſed my brain. Mr. Aſhgrove remarked the ſudden penſiveneſs of my manner, and expreſſed his hope that the intelligence I had heard was not materially connected with my happineſs.

The queſtion reached my heart, while it reproved my ſenſations. Why, thought I, why am I mortified and pained to know that another is happy? Why does the renovated repoſe of Lord Denmore render me doubly unquiet? I ſighed, but could not anſwer theſe tacit propoſitions; and an apprehenſion that they could only be ſolved to my diſadvantage prevented my repeating them.

Six months have paſſed ſince I have either ſeen or heard from Lord Denmore; in the letters which during that interval I have received from Mrs. Sewell, ſhe has been particularly reſerved reſpecting any intelligence which concerned him or his purſuits. Ah, Frances! what a variety of events might be compreſſed within the hours, the days, the weeks of this tedious, painful period! How many changes of ſcene and ſentiment might Lord Denmore have experienced, while I lingered through exiſtence in one dull round of mournful rumination!

After making various inquiries, and obtaining only vague and unſatisfactory anſwers, we quitted Portman-ſquare, and proceeded to an hotel in Oxford-ſtreet, where we propoſed ſleeping that night, and continuing our journey the following morning. It was near the duſk of evening when we entered the hotel,

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and Miſs Aſhgrove being greatly fatigued by the exerciſe of the day, requeſted that I would excuſe her at an early hour, and retired to her chamber.

The evening being ſultry, and my mind deeply impreſſed with penſive inquietude, Mr. Aſhgrove propoſed a ſhort walk, as a ſource of amuſement, till the time of ſupper. To this ſuggeſtion I readily conſented; conſcious that my ſpirits were too much dejected to render me a pleaſant companion by converſation; and knowing that, by a change of ſcenery alone, the ſombre caſt of melancholy may be taught to aſſume a more lively aſpect.

We walked near half an hour about the ſtreets in the vicinity of St. James's; as the pavement was thronged with pedeſtrians, and the ſky brightened by a clear moon-light, we amuſed ourſelves in contemplating the various

objects, and the gaudily illumined windows, which perpetually opened to our observation. Thus time journeyed on till we were returning towards home, when, passing a jeweller's shop in Bond-street, I observed a person standing near the door, in company with a lady, and earnestly engaged in examining some trinkets.

My agitation was extreme; I trembled, watched, and silently contemplated the object of my astonishment during several minutes. Mr. Ashgrove observed my perturbation, and reminded me that the hour was growing late, and that we purposed continuing our journey early in the morning. It was in vain that he attempted to draw me from the spot of fascination; I was absorbed, immoveable; my whole frame seemed transfixed, and I continued to gaze with increasing agitation.

"For Heaven's ſake Miſs Beauclerk," (for you will remember that ſuch was my aſſumed name,) "what can ſo powerfully intereſt your feelings?" ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove.

I preſſed his arm to keep him ſilent.

"This is extraordinary indeed," continued he: "and I am playing a very pleaſant part, in being the mute ſpectator of ſo intereſting a ſcene. Who, and what is the man ſo happy as to faſcinate your attention?"

"Pray, pray have patience," anſwered I in a whiſper. "Do not diſtreſs me, and I will inform you when we return to the hotel why, and for whom I am thus agitated." I could ſcarcely ſpeak; my voice was faltering, my heart throbbed convulſively, my breath was laboured, and I leaned on Mr. Aſhgrove's arm for ſupport.

Still the perſons about whom I was intereſted continued to examine a va-

riety of articles, which the jeweller, no leſs eminent for his taſte than for his extravagant charges, ſucceſſively preſented to their view. I now obſerved the lady taking a ſmall red leather caſe from her pocket, from which ſhe drew a miniature picture. The jeweller looked at it, and after a few minutes placed it in a private drawer, bowed, and the trio proceeded towards the ſhop door, where they parted.

I held my handkerchief to my face, and thought I ſhould have fainted. The lady wore a long white veil, and I had not at any moment during my agoniz-ing ſituation, the ſmalleſt glimpſe of her countenance. Her figure was elegant, ſhe was faſhionably dreſſed in white muſlin; and her companion ſeemed zealous in his attentions towards her.

We followed them till we reached the top of New Bond-ſtreet; Mr. Aſhgrove

Aſhgrove whoſe arm ſupported me, then turned his ſteps towards our hotel; and his ſurpriſe was eaſier to be imagined than deſcribed, when he heard me exclaim, "I will not go; I will follow them."

"Whom?" ſaid he peeviſhly.

"That man and woman," anſwered I: "for I muſt find out whither they are going."

"Do you know them?" inquired Mr. Aſhgrove, with ſome inquietude.

"I do not know the woman," anſwered I: "but I will, before I ſleep; for it intimately concerns my happineſs that I ſhould be ſatisfied who and what ſhe is."

"That wiſh may eaſily be accompliſhed," anſwered Mr. Aſhgrove: "for I will inform her of your wiſh; and ſhe cannot, if ſhe has either politeneſs or humanity, refuſe to gratify you."

He

He darted forwards to overtake them. I held his arm.

"Yet ſtay," cried I with a new ſenſation of alarm. "Do not diſcover me, for I ſhall not be able to ſupport the trial."

"Great God!" exclaimed Edward, with an energy that he could not maſter, "Why are you ſo much alarmed; and what have you to fear?"

I could not anſwer him: he continued:

"I conjure you to be candid. I am more intereſted in this ſtrange inquietude of your mind, than you can poſſibly imagine; and were my life to be the forfeit I would know the cauſe. Conſent then to return with me to the hotel, to tranquillize your ſpirits; and I pledge you my moſt ſolemn word of honour, that to-morrow I will relieve your anxiety, by compelling the

the jeweller to inform me of all you wiſh to know."

"To-morrow!" repeated I, in the agony of impatience. "To-morrow will be an age of time. I will know before I cloſe my eyes, or I will never ſleep again."

"This is frenzy," ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove. "But ſince it is your wiſh you ſhall inſtantly be ſatisfied." He quitted my arm and flew along the pavement after the ſtranger. I dared not follow him; but entering a fruit ſhop, and feeling myſelf overwhelmed by the conflicts of my mind, I ſunk on a chair, and loſt the power of utterance.

The miſtreſs of this luxurious temple haſtened towards me, and looking in my face, exclaimed, "Miſs St. Leger! Heaven's! what ails you?"

I ſtarted at her words, but had not ſtrength to anſwer her. She raiſed me from my ſeat, and led me towards

a parlour behind the ſhop: ſaying as ſhe held my arm, this place is too public, and if you ſhould faint, it will attract a crowd, and excite curioſity. I permitted her to guide me, and in a few moments I was ſeated on a ſofa; water was brought to refreſh me, and every effort made to reanimate my exhauſted ſpirits.

I looked earneſtly at my attendant; but though her features were in ſome degree familiar to me, I could not recollect when or where I had ſeen her. I requeſted to know her name; ſhe informed me that it was Leſage. She ſpoke with a faltering accent, and I was more at a loſs to recognize her than ever.

Finding myſelf in ſome degree recovered, I roſe, and thanking her for the civility, requeſted to know where ſhe had ſeen me, or how ſhe knew my name. She ſmiled, and anſwered that

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it was of no importance, for I ſhould not recollect her.

I preſſed her earneſtly to gratify my curioſity; ſhe ſaid ſhe had only ſeen me once, and that was in a place of public entertainment, where I was pointed out to her as the friend and *protegée* of Lady Denmore. This anſwer ſatisfied my mind, and I was preparing to take my leave, when Lord Melcomb entered the parlour. I ſtarted—he looked earneſtly at me, then at Madame Leſage: they both ſmiled, and my confuſion was undeſcribable.

"Miſs St. Leger!" cried Lord Melcomb: "I did not expect to meet *you* here. How long have you been in town? where do you reſide? I ſhall be happy in paying my reſpects to you, whenever and wherever you will permit me." A look, and a tone of voice impreſſively ſignificant, accompanied theſe words, which dulneſs itſelf muſt have

have comprehended. I gravely replied that I had no place of reſidence, but was merely a traveller.

"Alone!" inquired Lord Melcomb.

"No, my Lord," anſwered I. Again Madame Leſage ſmiled ſarcaſtically; his Lordſhip continued:

"Suffer me to attend you to your carriage, or to your hotel; I ſhall feel both fortunate and happy."

"I am not without protection," interrupted I gravely. "I only entered this ſhop, finding myſelf faint with the exceſſive heat of the weather, and I muſt decline the honour of your Lordſhip's attentions." I was going, but he ſhut the parlour door, Madame Leſage having left us, and again addreſſed me.

"I can now ſpeak without reſerve," ſaid Lord Melcomb: "therefore, I will confeſs to you, that after the reports which have been circulated, I did

did not ſuppoſe you would venture to be ſeen thus publicly. Your affair with Mr. Treville is no ſecret, and as his preſent attachment to another object is equally notorious, I can only conclude that you are reconciled to your ſituation."

I felt my colour change.

"My ſituation!" repeated I. "My Lord I do not comprehend you!"

"This is no place for a further explanation," ſaid he: "let us adjourn to my houſe; Lady Melcomb is not in town, and there we can talk over the buſineſs in ſafety."

My indignation was exceſſive. But when I reflected how ſtrongly appearances were againſt me, and how apt the world is to judge from prejudice, I endeavoured to tranquillize my reſentment, and calmly to explain the myſtery of my ſituation. "I am at this moment, and have been for a con-

conſiderable time, under the protection of kind and honourable friends," ſaid I: "and though I meet your Lordſhip with every diſadvantage which the place and the hour may conſpire to produce, I aſſure you that my conduct is blameleſs and my intentions pure. Thus far I am bound in my own defence to undeceive you; but if you perſevere in entertaining a ſuppoſition injurious to my honour, I ſhall only anſwer your ſuſpicions with contempt and ſcorn."

"I entreat your forgiveneſs," ſaid Lord Melcomb. "I credit all you ſay; and the belief that you are blameleſs, confirms my reſolution not to leave you ſo ſituated; you muſt permit me to be your protector till you meet thoſe friends, who will thank me for ſupplying their place at a moment ſo critical. I will attend you to your home, and I will then depart."

"That

"That is impoſſible," ſaid I. "My lodging for this night is not far diſtant; I know the way to it; and to-morrow I ſhall again leave London." As I concluded theſe words I returned to the ſhop; where Lord Melcomb taking my hand, again conjured me to accept his protection. "It is in vain," ſaid his Lordſhip, "that you endeavour to diſmiſs me; for wherever you go I am reſolved to follow you. The ſhop was now ſhutting, and I was perplexed beyond my patience: while for the firſt time, I felt the inconvenience which my aſſumed name had brought upon me, and the variety of mortifications which a diſcovery of my folly would inevitably produce. I knew that I ſhould for ever forfeit the protection of the Aſhgrove family; the friendſhip of Mary; the eſteem of Edward: I dreaded the reports which calumny had propagated, and I ſhrunk like a coward

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from the terrors of expoſure. Such are the effects of deception in whatever form it may be practiſed. And I am convinced, by experience, that the worſt of human calamities is not more agonizing than the perpetual fear of that diſgrace which is the companion of concealed indiſcretion.

Obliged to quit the ſhop, the ſhutters being cloſed, I haſtened along the pavement, Lord Melcomb ſtill perſiſting in his determination to attend me. We had not proceeded fifty paces, when we were joined by Mr. Aſhgrove, who, taking my arm placed it within his, and looking contemptuouſly at Lord Melcomb, inſtantly exclaimed, "Steer clear of this Lady, Sir, or you may chance to get a drubbing."

"Indeed!" ſaid Lord Melcomb, with a ſignificant ſmile: "from whom?"

"Shear off; vaniſh," ſaid the young ſailor. "This Lady belongs to me, and

and I am determined to protect her." Lord Melcomb ſtill walked by my ſide, and I trembled with apprehenſion.

We croſſed the ſtreet: he followed. "No dodging," ſaid Edward, huſtling his Lordſhip, and taking my other arm.

"The pavement is wide enough for us all," anſwered Lord Melcomb; "and I ſhall walk where I think proper." Again we recroſſed the ſtreet, and again Lord Melcomb followed us.

"Do not let us return to the Hotel," whiſpered I, heſitating: "I am terrified, and certain that you will be involved in a quarrel. Let us miſlead him: his Lordſhip will ſoon be weary of the purſuit."

"You know him then!" cried Mr. Aſhgrove with evident aſtoniſhment.

"I have ſeen him before," ſaid I, nearly ſinking with confuſion.

"Perhaps

"Perhaps it is your pleaſure that he ſhould accompany us," cried Mr. Aſhgrove: "if ſo, I ſhall obey your wiſhes." There was more of painful chagrin in his tone of voice, than inclination to fulfil his words. I entreated him not to leave me, and aſſured him, it was both diſagreeable and contrary to my deſire that Lord Melcomb ſhould attend us.

"Then I will ſoon ſettle the buſineſs," replied Mr. Aſhgrove. I now held his arm with all my ſtrength; while he, turning towards our purſuer, added, "My Lord, I command you to deſiſt: your conduct is offenſive to Miſs Beauclerk; and I truſt you will obey me."

Lord Melcomb laughed. "Forgive me, Madam," ſaid he, provokingly. "I thought that I was following the amiable and lovely Miſs St. Leger: but I was miſtaken."

"Then here the affair may end," ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove. "Your apology proves

proves, that your perſecutions originated in error; and you will, I truſt, deſiſt without farther altercation." Lord Melcomb was ſilent, but ſtill ſeemed reluctant to depart. Till meeting an acquaintance with whom he ſtopped to ſpeak, we turned ſhort round the corner of a narrow ſtreet, and loſt ſight of him. The reſult of Mr. Aſhgrove's inquiries I ſhall give you in a day or two. It is now paſt midnight, and the chaiſe is ordered to be at the door by ſeven o'clock: therefore, probably, my next letter will be from Briſtol. Adieu! adieu!

LETTER LXVIII.

The Same to the Same.

June 20, 1797.

As ſoon as we entered the hotel, I earneſtly requeſted to know the reſult of Mr. Aſhgrove's inquiries. He informed me, that I had little cauſe for uneaſineſs; for that I was in every reſpect miſtaken.

"You fancied that one of the perſons was known to you," ſaid he: "but I will convince you that your eyes deceived you, and that the man, as well as the woman, was an entire ſtranger."

I ſighed. He proceeded.

"Alarmed at your inquietude, I determined, though at the peril of my life, to obtain all the information you could poſſibly deſire upon the ſubject.

I followed

I followed the perſon who ſo evidently intereſted your feelings only a ſhort diſtance; for, on entering Stratford-Place, I heard him knock at a door, where he inſtantly obtained admittance."

"Proceed," ſaid I; "for I am all impatience."

"You have no cauſe to be alarmed," ſaid he: "for before he had entered the hall, I approached him, and deſired that he would inform me who the Lady was, then under his protection."

'The requeſt is ſingular,' ſaid he: 'but as there is no neceſſity for keeping her name a ſecret, I will comply, with pleaſure, though on one condition only.'

"Name it," ſaid I.

'That you will explain your motive for ſo extraordinary a queſtion.'

"Moſt readily."

Mr. Aſhgrove then informed me, that they entered a library on the ground-floor, and the following converſation paſſed between them.

'You deſire to know the Lady's name, who is miſtreſs of this houſe!'

"I do."

'From the dreſs which you wear, I conclude you are in the navy, and conſequently entitled to this interview."

"I am."

'Then, Sir, the Lady's name is Stanley. Now I requeſt that, on your part, you will be equally explicit.'

"There will be little trouble in ſatiſfying your commands. You know Miſs Beauclerk!"

'I know many of that name.'

"The perſon I mean is the daughter of a clergyman, an orphan, young, and extremely handſome."

'You

'You are miſtaken. I am not acquainted with any Lady who anſwers this deſcription.'

"Then, Sir, I crave your pardon. The perſon whom I mean was alſo deceived. I only made theſe inquiries, to relieve her mind from ſome anxiety: and, to prove that I am not impoſing on your credulity, I ſhall be glad of your company at breakfaſt, at ten to-morrow morning." Mr. Aſhgrove then gave his name, with his addreſs, and they parted.

During this recital a variety of conflicts ſtruggled in my boſom: but the concluſion of it nearly overpowered me. I knew that I was not miſtaken; and that the name I had aſſumed was the entire cauſe of my not being acknowledged. Again my heart throbbed to reveal the ſecret; while the conſciouſneſs of deceit nearly palſied it with terror.

"You cannot keep your engagement," ſaid I.

"It is impoſſible to break it," anſwered Mr. Aſhgrove. "I have therefore ordered the horſes at twelve o'clock, inſtead of ſeven." This intelligence ſhook my brain to the very centre. I had not words to utter my diſtreſs, but ſtood confuſed and thoughtful before him.

"What new perplexity aſſails you?" ſaid he, taking my hand, and ſmiling. "There is no neceſſity for your receiving this ſtranger: it is merely a viſit of ceremony, and will ſoon be over."

"Do you not know his name," ſaid I.

"In my haſte I never thought of aſking it," replied Mr. Aſhgrove; but it is immaterial; for perhaps he will not keep the appointment."

"Pray Heaven he may not," ſaid I. Then, recollecting my imprudence, I added,

added, "For his viſit will only retard the journey; and Mary's health requires our immediate attention."

We took a ſhort ſupper, which was prepared during our abſence; and my mind was wholly occupied in forming an excuſe for our departure. With this hope I haſtened to Miſs Aſhgrove's chamber: ſhe was ſtill awake; and I informed her that, as her brother had ſome buſineſs of importance to tranſact, which would detain him till noon, we would purſue our journey early in the morning, and he might overtake us.

Concluding that this arrangement had been made during our abſence, ſhe readily acquieſced; and I inſtantly dictated a note, which we meant to leave for Edward, informing him, that we ſhould wait for him at Salt-hill, ordered horſes for our departure at ſix o'clock, and paſſed the interval in writing this letter, which I conclude by day-light. Farewell.

LETTER LXIX.

The Same to the Same.

Salt-hill, June 22, 1797.

THE chaiſe was at the door by the hour appointed; and, without diſturbing Mr. Aſhgrove, we ſet forward on our journey. Mary, who had not the ſlighteſt ſuſpicion of what had happened the preceding evening, was in better ſpirits than uſual; and though her pale cheeks ſtill proved the ravages of ſickneſs, the voracious appetite of ſorrow which feeds on the bloom of withering beauty, ſhe ſtill endeavoured to ſmile, and to ſhake off the ſpell which fate had wound about her heart.

The account which I had received reſpecting the object of my curioſity and Miſs Stanley, inceſſantly perplexed my

my mind during our journey. Thought revolved with unceaſing and painful conjectures, and all the routine of my ſad moments preſented but a repetition of events, perpetually returning to the ſame central object. The laſt ſingular adventure was of all others the moſt myſterious; though I could in no way account for what I had ſeen, I ſought not to convince my mind that it might be deceived by appearances: ſo apt are we to believe what we fear, and to indulge our imagination at the expence of our repoſe.

The ſtranger came ſoon after eight o'clock. But Mr. Aſhgrove's aſtoniſhment was infinite, when he found him accompanied by Lord Melcomb. On entering the room a cold and ceremonious bow announced, at leaſt, no friendly viſit: Mr. Aſhgrove returned it with equal formality; and the purpoſe of

the ſtranger's arrival was ſpeedily unfolded.

"There is at preſent under your protection a Lady, whoſe name is St. Leger," ſaid the ſtranger.

Mr. Aſhgrove replied, that he knew no perſon of that name: the viſitor continued:

"Evaſion will ſerve but as a feeble ſubterfuge, where proofs are ſo ſtrongly againſt you; the lady has been ſeen in your ſociety, and that very recently."

"Impoſſible, Sir," ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove. Lord Melcomb ſmiled. The ſtranger proceeded:

"There are reaſons of the moſt important nature, why this myſtery muſt be inveſtigated. To deny the fact is uſeleſs; for, at the hazard of my life, I will be ſatisfied."

"The menace is too feeble to be regarded," replied Mr. Aſhgrove. "I give

give you my word of honour, as a ſurety for my veracity, while I declare that I know no ſuch perſon; and if you perſevere in diſcrediting my aſſertion, the ſooner we are *both* ſatisfied the better."

Lord Melcomb now addreſſed Mr. Aſhgrove: "This is not a time, Sir, for vague and abſurd equivocations. I therefore am bound to be explicit. The Lady, about whom my friend is ſo zealouſly intereſted, I ſaw laſt night in your ſociety."

"'Tis falſe!" replied Mr. Aſhgrove. Lord Melcomb reddened; but he made no anſwer.

"The perſon you mention, and whom you ſo rudely perſecuted, was Miſs Beauclerk," continued Edward.

The ſtranger now turning to his friend, calmly inquired whether he was certain of the fact; "Perhaps," ſaid

he, "you were miſtaken, and the time of night deceived you."

"By all that is ſacred, I not only ſaw her, but converſed with her; the light could not miſlead me, for I paſſed ſeveral minutes with her in the parlour at Madame Leſage's, where, alone, I found her."

The ſtranger's face turned pale at this intelligence. "Alone! in the parlour of the convenient Leſage!" repeated he. "Anſwer me, Sir, is this alſo a falſehood."

"A damnable one!" replied Mr. Aſhgrove. "A firſt-rate lie! or I am a ſcoundrel."

The ſtranger's credulity was ſtaggered at this impreſſive denial, and his *right honourable* friend was mute with conſternation. Mr. Aſhgrove continued:

"I know not whom you mean by Madame Leſage. I never even heard of ſuch a woman; the Lady who is under my protection, and in whoſe defence

defence my life ſhall readily be ſacrificed, is groſsly ſlandered."

"Her preſence will ſettle the diſpute," cried the ſtranger ſomewhat impatiently; "therefore, if you are a man of honour, you will produce her."

"*Being* ſuch, I ſcorn to give a proof of that, which my word, already pledged, is not deemed ſufficient to certify," replied Mr. Aſhgrove warmly; "therefore if you have any farther commands for me, I am eager to obey them. You underſtand me."

"There is but one way to ſettle the buſineſs," ſaid the ſtranger, at the ſame time giving his name: "I will meet you this evening at ſeven o'clock, on Blackheath; there we will decide the conteſt: I ſhall bring my friend; you will alſo find a ſecond."

"Agreed," ſaid Edward briefly.

Lord

Lord Melcomb became greatly agitated. "I lament this altercation," ſaid he, "and hope that it has not exceeded the bounds of accommodation. The ſight of the object in queſtion would terminate hoſtilities."

"That is not quite certain," interrupted the ſtranger: "I muſt ſee her what I wiſh, or one of us muſt periſh."

"At ſeven o'clock," ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove ſternly: at the ſame time proceeding to quit the apartment.

Lord Melcomb now advanced towards the door. "I requeſt, Sir," ſaid his Lordſhip, "I intreat that you will arrange this affair amicably. Suffer the Lady to appear, and the myſtery will be explained."

"I do not protect Miſs Beauclerk as a certificate that I am not a ſcoundrel," replied Mr. Aſhgrove. "I have pledged my word of honour, and I will at leaſt prove that it will paſs current, before I bring

bring a woman for my voucher. Now are you ſatisfied?"

At this moment a waiter entered the room, with the note which I had written, at the ſame time ſaying, "The Lady left London, Sir, at ſix o'clock, and wiſhes you to follow her as ſpeedily as poſſible."

This information convinced the ſtranger that Lord Melcomb's report was authentic, and his reſentment began to maſter his diſcretion. "Every chance of accommodation is now at an end," ſaid he: "for you have uttered an infamous falſehood."

The animated boſom of Edward Aſhgrove could little bear this inſult. He aimed a blow at the ſtranger; they were ſeparated; and at ſeven o'clock both parties repaired to the place of appointment.

They drew ſtraws for the firſt fire; chance gave the advantage to the ſtranger; and the ball paſſed through the right

right arm of his antagoniſt: they each fired another piſtol, when the ſurgeon interpoſed, declaring that the loſs of blood would endanger Mr. Aſhgrove's life: and the parties quitted the ground immediately.

The inſtant Edward's wound was dreſſed, he in defiance of all perſuaſion ſet out for this place, where, with the aid of Mr. Ruſh, (whoſe profeſſional ſkill is only to be equalled by his private worth,) we hope he will ſpeedily recover.

Adieu, my deareſt Frances; the perverſe fate which ſtill follows me does not yet ſubdue my fortitude; I am now accuſtomed to ſuſtain the preſſure of calamity; and the very ſhadow of repoſe is, I fear, for ever an alien from my boſom.

LETTER LXX.

The Same to the Same.

Monday morning, Salt-hill, June 24, 1797.

You may eaſily imagine the poignancy of my feelings at the moment when I wrote my laſt letter. All the conflicts that can touch the human ſenſe combined to agonize my boſom; and while I liſtened to Mr. Aſhgrove's recital, I reproached myſelf for every event that he unfolded. Ah, Frances! what a combination of horrors occupied my mind! What hopes, what fears, what trembling conſcious pangs aroſe within my heart, while I liſtened to the progreſs of that ſcene in which a lover and a friend were equally expoſed to danger. But all the agonizing terrors, all the throbbing emotions of my heart,

were

were leſs ſevere than that maſter pang which vanquiſhes all others! that miſery ſupreme, that gigantic ſhadow, which feeds itſelf on nothing, follows the *ignis fatuus* of viſionary dreams, and faſtening on the ſenſes, perverts the power of reaſon to its purpoſe. Frances, I need not tell you, that this never-reſting, this inſatiable fiend, is Jealouſy!

Ah! where ſhall I find reſt? where ſeek the oblivious balm that will heal my wounded boſom? Lord Denmore has yet a thought for the loſt Gertrude; but his days, his hours, are devoted to another.

He remembers me with affection; but is devoted to this new favourite. I cannot write her name; my hand trembles, my heart is burſting with agony. How, how ſhall I be convinced that ſhe is the object of Lord Denmore's choice? His *choice!*—Frenzy! frenzy is the aſſociate of that word.

Unfeeling

Unfeeling Denmore! What have I done to merit his neglect? What ſhall I do to puniſh his unkindneſs? In his mind I cannot but appear acquitted; for I find by letters which I received ſome time ſince from Mrs. Sewell, that the corpſe of Lady Denmore was opened, and her diſorder aſcertained to be a rapid decline. Of this circumſtance her huſband was ignorant, the order being given by the Ducheſs of Aldborough, and at her requeſt kept ſecret. But the calumnies propagated by Mr. Treville, having gained ſome confidence in the world, which is ever eager to depreſs the unfortunate, Mrs. Sewell reſolved on diſcovering the event to prove my innocence, and at the ſame time to defeat the purpoſe of inviduous ſlander.

Mr. Treville's recovery exonerates me from the crime of murder. The letters

letters which I wrote to Lord Denmore were dictated by conſcious pride, though they pleaded for that juſtice, which my innocence entitled me to hope for. It is true, I did not acquaint him with the place of my concealment: and my want of candour has now produced its attendant evil; for had I only mentioned the name of Aſhgrove, Lord Denmore had not been involved in this perilous rencontre.

But this Miſs Stanley. Heavens! is it poſſible that ſo neglected, ſo injured, ſo driven from every proſpect of felicity, I can ſtill love Lord Denmore? Love him, ah, Frances! almoſt to madneſs! Can I, knowing that he has abandoned me to ſorrow and ſecluſion; that he ſcorned my affection, humbled my pride, attempted even *my life!* Can I ſtill cheriſh in my boſom a paſſion, at once degrading, wild, and hopeleſs? Merci-

ful

ful God! by what faſcination does this being hold me: where, when will the ſpell be broken?

In the grave!

When the dark ſepulchre ſhall hide me; when this ſenſitive boſom ſhall be petrified in death; when theſe eyes ſhall weep no more, theſe pulſes ceaſe to beat; then ſhall Lord Denmore know the agony of unavailing ſorrow; the miſery of regret, never to be meliorated. Then ſhall he call to mind the intellectual hours that we have paſſed together; the many ſoothing dreams of laſting happineſs; the union of ſoul which hope animated, but which ever accumulating perſecutions have deſtroyed for ever.

Monday Evening.

Mr. Aſhgrove's wound has within the laſt twelve hours preſented alarming ſymptoms. His removal from London was

was contrary to the injunctions of his ſurgeon; and the careleſſneſs which he has evinced for his own ſafety, has at length produced the moſt perilous conſequences. He has alſo a greater degree of fever than was at firſt apprehended, and my lacerated heart is again menaced with a new trial.

The amiable and gentle Mary is agitated almoſt to deſpair, on account of her brother's precarious ſituation; her own health declines hourly; and the inceſſant attention, the daily ſolicitude, the nightly watching, which ſhe devotes to the invalid, viſibly augment the ſymptoms of her malady. I relinquiſh my pen to conſole her. Ah! ſad muſt be that boſom, which can receive even a momentary ſolace, from the ſympathy of ſuch a mortal.

Tueſday Morning.

I have not cloſed my eyes ſince I dropped my pen. My heart is almoſt burſting

burſting with ſorrow. Edward is in extreme danger. His wound is leſs alarming than the inquietude of his mind. He talks and raves, and repeats my name perpetually. The evident perturbation which I could not conceal on the fatal evening preceding his rencontre with Lord Denmore, has excited ſuſpicions that, though unknown to his Lordſhip, I entertain for him more than eſteem; for he believes that an object may be idolized, even to diſtraction, though almoſt a ſtranger to the perſon faſcinated. Of this poſſibility I have alſo ſome belief; for I loved Lord Denmore,—alas, Frances! paſſionately loved him, before I was taught to value the delight of his ſociety.

In my defence Mr. Aſhgrove received the fatal challenge; if he ſhould periſh, how ſhall I ſupport my grief; where hide myſelf from the expoſure of that deception which will eternally diſgrace me?

me? By aſſuming a falſe name, what miſeries have I drawn upon myſelf; what pangs ſhall I be deſtined to encounter! Why, why, with the conſciouſneſs of innocence for my ſhield, why did I debaſe myſelf, by aſſuming the maſk of hypocriſy? Had I been criminal, I could only have availed myſelf of ſuch a ſubterfuge. But being guiltleſs, the deceit was little ſhort of madneſs.

Tueſday Evening.

Nothing leſs than amputating the limb will preſerve the life of our brave and generous Edward. The anxiety of his mind has augmented the fever in his veins, and it is neceſſary that the dreadful operation ſhould be performed without farther heſitation. He heard the deciſion without the ſmalleſt ſymptom of regret. "I only part with my arm reluctantly," ſaid he, "becauſe my country might have found employment for it. But

ſince it has been devoted to the cauſe of an inſulted woman, I ſhall not repent the ſacrifice."

He then requeſted that he might be permitted to ſee me once more before he loſt his 'fin,' merely to aſk me if I could love a mutilated ſailor; "becauſe," added he, "if Gertrude will not, in future, be my pilot, I ſhall give my ſurgeon the trouble to no purpoſe; for I would rather take my badge of honour to the grave, than live without the hope of being her's for ever."

Ah, Frances! how little does the gallant Edward know the being whoſe affections he would poſſeſs; whoſe friendſhip he commands; and whoſe ſenſe of his kindneſs will augment her afflictions to the laſt moment of her exiſtence.

Tueſday Night.

I have ſeen my ſuffering protector; I have knelt by his ſide, and bathed his

hand with the tears which flowed in torrents from my diſtracted brain. He ſpoke with compoſure; ſmiled complacently; conjured me to tranquilliſe my mind; and bleſſed the hour which had produced that ſympathy, whoſe power would ſoothe his pain, and ſtrengthen his reſolution. I cannot deſcribe the ſcene; every eye bore the tribute of regret, while every boſom glowed with admiration. The only placid being was Edward Aſhgrove; his countenance was ſerene; but every feature was ſoftened by affection; his thoughts ſeemed wholly intent on me, and even the tone of his voice was expreſſive of his feelings: this was indeed an hour of trial!

I knelt beſide his bed; but I had not the power to utter a ſyllable during the firſt ten minutes; whenever I attempted to expreſs my regret, the full heart inſtantly beat, and vanquiſhed the efforts of articulation. Mary, who ſtood bending over her brother's pillow, in a convul-

convulſive whiſper conjured me to ſpeak to him. "Say one kind word of conſolation," cried ſhe ſobbing; "only aſſure him, that he has your friendſhip, your eſteem." Edward who overheard her entreaties, looked—oh, Frances!—he looked more than the eloquence of words could utter: after ſome moments had paſſed, he preſſed my hand, ſighed, ſhook his head, and exclaimed—"Oh God! why ſhould I wiſh to preſerve an exiſtence that will be hateful to me?" Then gently reſigning my hand, which till that moment he had held firmly, he added, "Gertrude, I will not extort that affection which your heart cannot beſtow involuntarily; I diſdain to take advantage of my danger—or to awaken your ſenſibility in defiance of your judgment. I am not worthy of your heart; I am puniſhed for my arrogance in aſpiring to ſuch a treaſure." He pauſed—and ſeemed exhauſted—Mr. Ruſh now en-

tered the room, he felt the pulſe of his patient, and made me a ſignal to withdraw. "I will return in a few moments," ſaid I, riſing, and following him to the adjoining room, where he thus addreſſed me:

"Mr. Aſhgrove's ſituation is precarious in the extreme; the viſible agitation of his mind has produced every alarming ſymptom, and nothing but repoſe can preſent a chance of his recovery."

"Do you really think his life in danger?" ſaid I.

"In imminent danger," replied Mr. Ruſh, while the expreſſion of his countenance beſpoke the exquiſite feelings of his heart. "A few hours," added he, "will terminate this unfortunate affair, unleſs we can perſuade him to tranquillize his mind. For, in his preſent ſtate, the operation would prove fatal."

My

My deſpair was infinite: I requeſted permiſſion to ſee him, but for five minutes, with only his ſiſter preſent: and inſtantly returned to the chamber. Mr. Aſhgrove's features were expreſſive of manly reſignation: but Mary's countenance was wild and convulſive. She folded her arms about my neck; bathed me with tears, and inarticulately murmured, "Oh! ſave him!—ſave him!—"

Penetrated by her ſorrow, again I threw myſelf upon my knees beſide the bed; I ſnatched the feveriſh hand, and preſſed it to my lips—"Live, Edward!" ſaid I, "live, for my ſake! I will be yours, my days ſhall be devoted to your happineſs."

The exhauſted ſpirit, could not ſuſtain the ſudden exceſs of joy:—he ſighed, and cloſing his languid eyes, loſt all ſenſation. I ſhrieked aloud: Mary exclaimed, "He is dead!" and inſtantly fainted.—The evening was far advanced, and Mr. Ruſh requeſted that

Edward might be left to his care. He aſſured us that the alarming appearance entirely proceeded from the exhauſted ſtate of his nerves; and that there remained no hope but in the night's tranquillity. Mary, who had been removed from her brother's ſide, revived; and with reluctance we retired to watch and to indulge our ſorrow in the adjoining chamber.

The hours paſſed tediouſly; every ſigh, every groan, which the ſufferer breathed, during the early part of the night, pierced my heart to the centre. At day-break Mr. Ruſh ſtole into our apartment, to ſay that his patient had ſlept three hours calmly: his countenance was again the index of his mind, and it conveyed conſolation.

It is evening when I conclude this letter. Mr. Aſhgrove has been tranquil during the day; the alarming ſymptoms abate rapidly, and hope once more ſmiles on our misfortunes. Adieu!

LETTER LXXI.

The Same to the Same.

Salt-hill, June 30, 1797.

SHORTLY after I closed my last letter, we were surprised by the unexpected arrival of Lord Melcomb. He had discovered Mr. Ashgrove's place of abode, by a paragraph in one of the newspapers, and at the express desire of Lord Denmore, had made us the visit. At first Miss Ashgrove refused to see him; but on his persevering to solicit an interview, he was at length admitted.

Still fearful of new calamities, I resolutely determined not to see the meddling messenger of mischief. But the apartment in which Miss Ashgrove received his lordship being situated next

to our chamber, I could diſtinctly hear every ſyllable they uttered.

Lord Melcomb on entering the room, immediately requeſted that he might be honoured by an interview with Miſs St. Leger. Mary, without heſitation, replied that ſhe knew 'no ſuch perſon.' His lordſhip ſmiled ſceptically, and added, "Gertrude——"

"She is indiſpoſed, and will ſee no company," was the laconic anſwer.

"Will you ſo far indulge me as to convey a meſſage to her from Lord Denmore?"

"My acquieſcence or refuſal will depend on the purport of it," replied Miſs Aſhgrove.

"You are Gertrude's friend—" ſaid Lord Melcomb.

"She honours me with that title."

"Then," ſaid his Lordſhip, "her connection with Lord Denmore is probably no ſecret."

"I never

"I never heard her ſpeak of him:—you are ſtill, my Lord, in error," anſwered Miſs Aſhgrove; "for I am perſuaded that Miſs Beauclerk is a ſtranger to Lord Denmore."

"It would be ſingular, indeed, if ſhe ſhould not know the perſon, who during ſuch a length of time, has loved her ſo tenderly," cried Lord Melcomb. "But, ſince it is her pleaſure to diſown the being whoſe affection is undiminiſhed, notwithſtanding her imprudent conduct, I have only to lament her folly, and to reſign my every hope of ſerving her. Yet before I return to my unhappy friend, I muſt requeſt that you will acquaint Mr. Aſhgrove with his ſentiments. He by no means feels ſatisfied with the termination of the rencontre; he does not conſider the blood of an enemy as the balm for his afflictions!"

"What would he require?" ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove haſtily.

"Repoſe of mind; which can never be his, till the object of his ſolicitude ſhall return, and prove herſelf worthy his affection."

"I do not comprehend your Lordſhip!" ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove.

"You are then a ſtranger to the romantic fondneſs which Lord Denmore feels for Miſs Beauclerk."

"For Miſs Beauclerk! is it poſſible?" exclaimed my friend, with painful emotion; "then Edward's hopes are at an end; his deſtiny decided!"

"Yes, madam," continued Lord Melcomb, "the being, of all others, the moſt dear to Lord Denmore's heart, is the Lady whom a few nights ſince I found in the houſe of a procureſs, and afterwards followed, under the protection of Mr. Aſhgrove. Through my mentioning the circumſtance of having met them, and my watching them unobſerved to the hotel, Lord Denmore inter-

interpreted the myſtery of the viſit which was prompted by curioſity; and, having Mr. Aſhgrove's addreſs, we found little difficulty in demanding an explanation."

"A fatal explanation!" ſighed Miſs Aſhgrove.

"I lamented its neceſſity," interrupted Lord Melcomb; "but it was unavoidable. And if it ſhould terminate fatally, the object who provoked it has only to thank herſelf for the abſurdity of her conduct. Lord Denmore is apprized of Mr. Aſhgrove's danger, and has thought it prudent to depart for Hamburgh. But he earneſtly conjured me, before he embarked, to inform Miſs Beauclerk that his affection was undiminiſhed; that he felt the fondeſt intereſt in her welfare; and that any imprudent conduct of her's, would deeply, ſenſibly afflict him."

Frances! imagine my ſituation, for I cannot deſcribe it.

Lord Melcomb again conjured Miſs Aſhgrove to inform me, that he wiſhed only to ſay a few words of the utmoſt importance to me before his departure. "I have a meſſage for her from Lord Denmore, which I cannot on any account deliver to another perſon. She will repent her obſtinacy if ſhe perſiſts in refuſing to hear it, for it will depend entirely on her paſt conduct, whether or not ſhe is the happieſt of mortals."

My beating heart was torn with contending conflicts. I was on the point of ruſhing into the apartment, when a meſſenger from Mr. Aſhgrove requeſted my immediate attendance. I obeyed—and followed till I entered the chamber.

Edward was awake, and looking cheerfully at me, exclaimed, "Oh, guardian angel! how, how ſhall I thank you?

you? What words can expreſs the gratitude, the affection of my heart? Deareſt, deareſt of women, I live! I *will* live to prove how much I love you."

A confuſed and trembling ſtupor ſeemed to overpower my ſenſes. We were alone—the nurſe had quitted the chamber—I would have unburthened the weighty load of grief which hung about my heart, but the dread of again endangering his ſafety chained my tongue. He obſerved my embarraſſed mien, my diſordered features. I approached his pillow with tottering ſteps—the anguiſh of my ſoul palſied my feeble limbs, and I ſunk upon his arm in an agony of ſorrow.

Unable to account for this ſudden perturbation, he called aloud for aſſiſtance. He had only one arm that was capable of ſupporting me, and the terror which my ſituation produced upon

upon his mind nearly hurried him to madneſs.

Again he called vehemently for aſſiſtance, and in a few moments Miſs Aſhgrove, followed by Lord Melcomb, ruſhed into the chamber.

By this time I had loſt all conſciouſneſs of my ſituation. My head was on Edward's pillow, his left arm ſuſtained me from falling. My features pale and inanimate, his wild and diſtorted, aſtoniſhed Lord Melcomb; and with a look of regret, blended with amazement, he exclaimed, "By Heavens! it is as I feared; and Denmore will be wretched." His Lordſhip now took his leave; and, without waiting for a further explanation, ſet off for London.

Mr. Aſhgrove's arm has, ſince that period, continued to preſent every favourable ſymptom. The appearances which menaced the neceſſity of amputation have entirely vaniſhed, and his recovery

recovery is now rapidly advancing. He conſiders Lord Melcomb's viſit as merely accidental, and his refined ſenſe of honour (added to his regard for my repoſe) has never permitted him to mention the name of Lord Denmore.

Such, Frances, is my ſituation; ſuch are the miſeries of a mind torn by contending paſſions: by gratitude impreſſed; by friendſhip warmed; by affection tortured! I have pledged my hand to Edward; but my heart,—oh! my friend! thou knoweſt that my heart is Lord Denmore's! faithfully, irrecoverably, eternally Lord Denmore's!

LETTER LXXII.

The Same to the Same.

Salt-hill, July 12, 1797.

THE progreſs of Mr. Aſhgrove's recovery has proved propitious even to the extent of our hopes, and there is every probability that in a few days we ſhall be able to proceed on our journey. Mary's health declines hourly, and I lament while I tremble at the proſpect of her diſſolution. Yet, Frances, while my weary mind retraces the mazy paths which I have been doomed to traverſe; while reaſon gives to memory the many ills attendant on this ſcene of ſublunary trial, I ſcarcely think that thoſe who are haſtening to 'a better world,' ſhould be conſidered

as

as objects of our pity. The happieſt moments of exiſtence are but the deluſions of a ſummer dream; they glide away, and the dark, the gloomy hour returns, to convince us that we are mortal. Then, is not Mary, ſtealing to the grave, far happier than the gay and giddy votary of pleaſure; is ſhe not preparing for that reſting-place where the wretched find repoſe; and to which the ſons of luxury and pride, the withering mourner, the perſecuted child of virtue, and the baſe, the gilded caitiff alike muſt journey before they reach

"That undiſcovered country, from whoſe bourne
"No traveller returns?"

Mr. Aſhgrove, notwithſtanding all my endeavours to conceal the inquietude of my mind, frequently remarks it: and, with an intereſting concern, entreats me to divulge the ſorrow which evi-

dently

dently preys upon my ſenſes. He has been, during the laſt four days, permitted to leave his chamber; and, in order to divert his mind, Mary and myſelf have alternately read to him the few books which we can procure in the neighbourhood of our preſent abode. But alas, Frances! my tongue articulates, and my eyes wander over the pages even of the moſt intereſting works, while my whole ſoul is abſorbed by one abſent object; and my ever-buſy thoughts tracing the footſteps of a far diſtant traveller.

Laſt night, at the concluſion of a pathetic ſtory, I turned two pages, and ſtill continued to read, without being conſcious of my error. Mr. Aſhgrove with a tone of chagrin interrupted me. "My ſweet friend," ſaid he, "whither are your ſtraying? Your mind does not keep pace with your ſtudies; your thoughts take no intereſt in the tale of

of ſorrow which your voice conveys to your hearers."

"What ſorrow?" ſaid I with confuſion. "Indeed I am not ſorrowful."

This incoherent anſwer rendered him impatient. "You cannot deceive me," added Edward haſtily: "I ſee, I know that you are unhappy, and I feel that I am unworthy of your confidence. Yet why ſhould you diſſemble. I am an irritable being; I love you dearer than all other objects; but I am too proud to take advantage of an extorted promiſe." His feelings got the better of his ſtrength, and he could not proceed. I trembled and ſighed, while the book fell from my hand, and my face was covered with bluſhes.

"Ah, Gertrude!" added Mr. Aſhgrove, "why have you deceived me? why did you preſerve a life which I fear will never be devoted to your happineſs? But I deſerve my fate," added

added he with increaſing emotion: "it was a baſe, a degrading contract, and you have a right to break it: and may I periſh like a coward, if I avail myſelf of that moment when pity took the command of that rein which ſhould have been guided by reflection only!"

"I am ſenſible of your worth," ſaid I, heſitating; "and my obligations to you are infinite."

"I reſcued your name from inſult, and the recompence was more than equal to the labour," replied Mr. Aſhgrove. "The gratification which I felt, far, very far outweighed the peril I encountered. And had I known that the object of my reſentment was a being of your choice, I would have defended you with equal ardour, till I taught him to deſerve you." My diſtreſs was evident; but I was mute though almoſt overwhelmed with agitation.

"Tran-

"Tranquillize your mind," continued Edward, with aſſumed ſerenity; "and reſt aſſured that however fatal the event may prove to my repoſe; however ſevere the pangs of regret may be, I will reſign all hopes of happineſs in the poſſeſſion of an object, whoſe heart is evidently devoted to another. I ſhall not value exiſtence, deprived of ſuch a treaſure; but," added he with a ſigh, "in theſe tumultuous times, a ſailor's life may quickly be diſpoſed of."

"Heaven forbid!" ſaid I, ſhuddering at the idea. Mary's ſenſibility ſpoke in a tear, with all the eloquence of nature. Edward continued:

"What buſineſs had I on ſhore? The ocean is my element; I was created to live amidſt ſtorms and perils: to buffet the wild waves, to liſten to the howling tempeſt, and to fall in the defence of my country."

"For heaven's ſake do not entertain ſuch melancholy thoughts," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove.

"Do you call that a mournful hour which terminates a ſcene of miſery?" ſaid Edward. As he ſpoke, a look which penetrated my brain, for a moment threw a deepened fluſh upon my cheek; Frances, it was the impulſe of compunction, the reproof of conſcious ingratitude; I could not conceal it.

"Forgive me," ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove, taking my hand, which I had not power to withdraw, "I meant not to reproach you; I reſpect your ſorrows, I adore the ſenſibility of your heart; and whatever pain the ſacrifice may inflict, I will promote your felicity."

"Alas! felicity is not within the limits of my deſtiny," ſaid I.

"Say not ſo, Gertrude," interrupted Edward; "you will, I truſt, be happy when the rough waves ſhall paſs over my

my breaſt, which will then be inſenſible to every ſorrow."

"For pity's ſake do not diſtract me," ſaid I, riſing from my ſeat, and walking haſtily about the room.

"How acute is your ſenſibility, my dear Gertrude!" cried Miſs Aſhgrove. "You muſt allow a mind, romantic as my brother's, to indulge its fancy."

"There you miſtake me," ſaid Edward, again ſighing deeply; "my regret is real; it was only my hope of happineſs that was imaginary. I fancied that my days would be devoted to the moſt amiable of women; that if it was my deſtiny to periſh glorioufly, her tears would conſecrate my memory. But now I ſhall be deſtined to toil on the wild and boiſterous deep, ſeeking no occupation but in danger, and courting no friend—but death.—"

"I will not hear you," ſaid I, with increaſed emotion. "You torture, you afflict me beyond my fortitude."

"Your ſufferings will be tranſient," ſaid Edward, "mine, Gertrude, will be meaſured with my days."

Miſs Aſhgrove's uneaſineſs was viſible. She endeavoured to change the converſation, but Edward's mind ſtill dwelt upon his diſappointed hopes, and my boſom ſympathized in thoſe regrets which it had no heart to ſoften. I felt the warmeſt, the tendereſt friendſhip for my brave, my kind protector; and had there not exiſted ſuch a mortal as Lord Denmore, I ſhould have loved him beyond all other objects. But my deſtiny is decided—my miſery marked by an irrevocable fiat; all efforts to eraſe it are ineffectual, and I muſt await its ſombre progreſs with the obedience of ſubmiſſion.

The hour now arrived when Mr. Aſhgrove was ordered to retire to reſt: he took his leave with a reſpectful attention, which had a marked and repulſive coldneſs in it, unuſual to his manner.

manner. I had not power to anſwer him. I was aſtoniſhed and mortified to find that he could behave leſs kindly towards me than I had taught myſelf to hope he felt. I had been accuſtomed to looks and words warmly affectionate; and though I wiſhed them to proceed from eſteem more than from love, I could not bear that change which I was not conſcious of deſerving.

My thoughts wandered, and my mind was perplexed during the whole night; my pride was checked, my vanity offended: I demanded nothing more than friendſhip from Mr. Aſhgrove, and I had been guilty of no action that might deſerve indifference. Perhaps, thought I, he wiſhes to remind me of my obligations, and expects that return which gratitude requires, whatever the feelings of my heart may dictate. Conjecture then whiſpered that Lord Melcomb had betrayed me, by his converſation with Miſs Aſhgrove, and

that the deception which I had raſhly employed had ſunk me even to contempt in Edward's opinion. Again my indignant ſpirit covered my face with bluſhes. I felt the ſtrong colour of reſentment burn in my cheek as it ruſhed from my palpitating boſom. The information which Lord Melcomb repeated, reſpecting his finding me with the 'convenient Leſage,' next thrilled acroſs my brain; and the concluſion which followed the reflection formed a new ſource of indignation. He believes me infamous, he wiſhes to withdraw his friendſhip; his penetrating regret was merely a pretext to extort from me a confeſſion of my real character, and to authoriſe a fair excuſe for abandoning me to my ſorrows—"Yes, Edward, I will releaſe you from thoſe attentions of which you deem me unworthy; I will not augment my obligations; I will avow myſelf an impoſtor—I will bear the blame I merit—but I will

will not ſuſtain one atom of that load which calumny would heap upon me; for the moment that you *know* me, I ſhall be *loſt* to you for ever!" Such were my ſelf-whiſpered thoughts, till, exhauſted by the fatigue of rumination, I cloſed my eyes, and for a time forgot even the conſciouſneſs of ſorrow.

It was late when I joined Miſs Aſhgrove and Edward at breakfaſt. I ſtopped for ſome moments before I had courage to enter the room. I paced the gallery which led to the apartment twice, ſettling my features into a fixed reſerve, and calling up all the pride of my boſom to ſuſtain the trial.

On my entering the room Mr. Aſhgrove roſe from his ſeat; bowed formally, reached me a chair with his left hand, and again reſeating himſelf, began to read the newſpaper. His right arm was in a ſling; his countenance was extremely pale, but placid, even to per-

fect indifference. I alſo, for the firſt time, perceived a change in Mary's conduct. She gave me tea, with a half bend of ceremonious coldneſs; talked of ſoon recommencing her journey; was ſorry that ſhe had detained me ſo long in attending her brother; and hoped that a diverſity of ſcene would reſtore my ſpirits, though ſhe might not have the pleaſure of witneſſing the change. I knew not how to anſwer her; my heart was almoſt burſting. But my pride again roſe triumphant over my chagrin, and my boſom once more glowed with the conſciouſneſs of virtue.

I calmly aſſured Miſs Aſhgrove that my pleaſure was infinite in beholding her brother ſo nearly recovered; that I ſhould never ceaſe to remember his kind interference between my fame and its calumniator; and that, though I ſhould lament the conſequences of the *rencontre*, I ſhould never forget to conſider

conſider that as one of the proudeſt days of my exiſtence, in which I owed the defence of my reputation to the zeal and courage of a man of honor.

" I think that there was ſomewhat of raſhneſs as well as courage in my brother's conduct," replied Miſs Aſhgrove; " he ſhould have been leſs precipitate, being ignorant of the cauſe for Lord Melcomb's aſſertions."

" The cauſe!" repeated I. " Your indifference now aſſumes the appearance of rudeneſs. I am not conſcious of any cauſe for Lord Melcomb's calumny. Mr. Aſhgrove is no ſtranger to all which paſſed that evening.

" I allude to events prior to that period," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove. " But I have no right to arraign your conduct. I have only to condemn your want of candour: for being no ſtranger to your extraordinary hiſtory, I lament,

that while I pity, I muſt alſo blame you.'

A thouſand emotions of doubt, vexation, ſhame, reſentment, and pride, ruſhed through my boſom, as ſhe concluded this ſarcaſtic innuendo. I was humbled to the very extent of humiliation; I ſeemed to ſhrink into an atom. Mr. Aſhgrove, whoſe countenance betrayed the varying conflicts of his ſoul, ſtill kept his eyes upon the newſpaper, but they were viſibly fixed on one ſpot, and their intelligent luſtre ſeemed to look inward on his mind. I continued to obſerve him during ſeveral moments: his inquietude convinced me that he was conſcious I did ſo; but his features were ſtill unmoved. I now turned towards Mary; for, notwithſtanding her unkind reproaches, I ſtill eſteemed her. She had alſo ſelected an object for immovable attention; and the gaudy

gaudy colours of the carpet faſcinated her vacant gaze, while ſuffering friendſhip ſought in vain for a look of conſolation.

More than half an hour paſſed in this ſtagnation of our faculties, when the waiter entered the room and requeſted to have the newſpaper. This errand had ſcarcely broke the ſilence, when Miſs Aſhgrove, as if eager to avail herſelf of the occaſion, abruptly roſe and quitted the apartment. It was now, for the firſt time, that Edward's countenance aſſumed an expreſſion which almoſt maddened me. An air of eaſy careleſs gaiety ſeemed to metamorphoſe his whole mien, and with a tone at once indifferent and provoking, he inquired "how I had ſlept, and whether I had dreamed of my friend Lord Denmore?"

I replied, "that both my reſt and my dreams had been undiſturbed by conſcious reproaches."

"Then I preſume that Mr. Treville took no part in them."

I ſtarted——

"Fear nothing," ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove: "in my boſom the diſcovery ſhall be ſacred. I will yet endeavour to promote your happineſs; I will find Lord Denmore, and conduct you to him." Then riſing and taking my hand as he approached me, he added: "Ah, Gertrude! had you really been that which you ſeemed, a legion of rivals ſhould not have forced me to reſign you."

I preſſed my hands over my eyes and had not power to utter a ſyllable even in my own juſtification during ſeveral minutes; Mr. Aſhgrove leaning forward kiſſed my cheek. I roſe abruptly, and with a tone at once diſtreſſed and dignified, demanded an explanation of his conduct.

He ſmiled.—My indignation had nearly overpowered my ſenſes, when a torrent

torrent of tears relieved me, and I once more breathed a reaſoning, thinking creature. "Explain," ſaid I; "for you are egregiouſly in error."

"Then I read my recantation," ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove; "yet you muſt allow me time to reconcile my mind to the diſappointment. You muſt make ſome allowance for my chagrin, my regret, for notwithſtanding all that has paſſed, I cannot help loving you." I would have quitted the room, he detained me.

"Why fly from me?" ſaid he. "Believe me, Gertrude, I do not wiſh to wound your feelings. I only lament that you have not acted more candidly; and though I might have taken you in tow for life, I ſhould now have no objection to ſwing with you in the ſame hammock."

"For heaven's ſake," interrupted I, with a voice expreſſive of the

ſtrongeſt irritation, "Do not affect to miſinterpret my conduct. You cannot really ſuppoſe me a being of that ſpecies who will tamely bear ſuch treatment. Tell me all you know of me; all that calumny has invented; if I am juſtly accuſed I will plead guilty." Mr. Aſhgrove, fixing his eyes on mine, demanded whether I was ſerious.

"Perfectly ſo," ſaid I briefly.

"And you will not be offended if I obey your injunctions."

"Aſſuredly not," was my anſwer.

"Give me one ſmile, and I will tell you all I know."

"I am ſorry that your honeſty ſhould want a bribe," ſaid I indignantly.

"It is my courage that requires a charm which will ſuſtain it," anſwered Mr. Aſhgrove.

"Pardon me, if I do not credit the aſſertion," ſaid I. "You have evinced ſufficient reſolution to inſult an unoffend-

ing

ing woman, and yet you ſhrink from the taſk of rendering juſtice to her reputation."

"Come, come, Miſs St. Leger," interrupted Mr. Aſhgrove, "throw aſide this maſk which will neither augment my eſteem, nor convince me that I am in error. You are a lovely faſcinating girl, and I only lament that fortune has not placed me in the firſt ranks of life, to——"

"What would you ſay?" cried I, with a voice agitated ſo greatly as to become ſcarcely articulate.

"In truth, but little, Gertrude," replied Mr. Aſhgrove, ſmiling. "I would not be profuſe in words, but I would evince by actions. You ſhould ſhare my fate if the participation were of an empire."

My heart throbbed indignantly, my lips quivered, and I again attempted to quit the apartment; but Mr. Aſhgrove

entreated me to ſtay only a few moments, if I 'valued my own ſafety.' I ſtarted as he pronounced theſe words; the idea of Mr. Treville inſtantly convulſed my brain, and terror chained my feet to the ſpot where I then ſtood.

"Fear not, Gertrude," ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove: "I know by experience, that jealouſy is the moſt powerful, as well as the moſt agonizing ſenſation which the heart is capable of feeling. I am perſuaded, that there is no act of frenzy, however deſperate, which might not be prompted by this mental demon. That you have felt its influence is evident; that you ſtill labour under its pangs, obſervation, leſs ſcrutinizing than that of a lover, might, long ſince, have diſcovered by unequivocal ſymptoms."

I ſighed, but made no anſwer. He pauſed ſeveral minutes, and then, with a tone of voice which proved the ſympathy of his heart, continued:

"Indeed,

"Indeed, Gertrude, I feel deeply intereſted in your ſtory; and though I blame your want of candour, I lament the fatal neceſſity which urged you to adopt deceit. From the general character of Lord Denmore and Mr. Treville, I can make great allowances for your paſt conduct; for I believe that, had it been your deſtiny to meet with leſs artful, or leſs daring objects, your mind had ſtill remained pure and immaculate."

"Is it poſſible that you can believe me criminal?" ſaid I. While Mr. Aſhgrove was meditating an anſwer, which, from the emotion viſible in his countenance, promiſed at leaſt a wiſh to ſooth my diſtreſs, Mary entered the room. She had evidently been in tears, and her countenance preſented regret, blended with aſtoniſhment, while ſhe fixed her eyes intently on my features.

"And

"And you too, Mary!" ſaid I, taking her hand, and endeavouring to ſuppreſs the feelings of my heart: "Do you ſuppoſe me guilty." Her colour changed, and her lips quivered, while ſhe inarticulately anſwered, "I know not what to think."

"Think me the moſt oppreſſed, and moſt unhappy of human beings," interrupted I: "a creature formed to bear the perſecutions of a diſaſtrous fate; to buffet the fierceſt ſtorms of adverſe fortune; to encounter the inſults of an unfeeling world; the ſneers of pride; the ſcorn of vulgar minds; the reproaches of the ſternly-organized, and frigid monitor: think me what I am; a ſad, unfortunate, and injured mortal; the dupe of ſubtle natures; the victim of a proud, reſiſting paſſion; the ſlave of deceptive circumſtances, bowed to the earth with ſorrow, and at the ſame moment

moment ſcorning to diſgrace my indignant ſpirit, by yielding to the ſtigma which malice would attach to my name: for, however ſtrongly appearances may be againſt me, I ſtill am innocent."

Whether my tone of voice or manner impreſſed my hearers I know not; but they both viewed me with a doubtful heſitation, which rather inclined to a diſbelief of reports prejudicial to my fame, than diſpoſed them to perſevere in their unjuſt opinion. Mary looked earneſtly at me, then at her brother, who with folded arms, and eyes bent on the ground, ſeemed to meditate while he half indulged the ſentiment of the moment. After a pauſe of ſeveral minutes, Mr. Aſhgrove ſuddenly ſtarting from his reverie, abruptly quitted the room, while Mary, taking my hand and ſighing, exclaimed, "Oh Heavens! Gertrude, if it ſhould be a fabrication; if

you

you are innocent, how ſhall I ever hope to be forgiven?

"I know not of what crime I am accuſed," ſaid I; "therefore I am unprepared for my defence. Inform me, and I will candidly declare how far I may be deemed guilty; but I conjure you to be explicit, and to keep me no longer in ſuſpenſe: for I muſt now act decidedly."

"What new deed of deſperation do you meditate," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove eagerly.

I ſmiled. "You miſtake me," anſwered I: "the ſtep I meditate will be that of a reaſoning mortal, claiming at leaſt an exoneration from imputed crimes, and exerting that ſpirit which will teach her to reſent an inſult."

"I do not comprehend you!"

"Then believe my words upon the doubtful evidence they preſent."

"Give

"Give me ſome proof," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove, heſitating: "I cannot form my opinion upon mere conjecture."

"Yet you could accuſe me of criminality without one blackening ſhade of evidence againſt me!" She ſeemed to feel the reproof, and with a ſigh replied, "I ſtand convicted!"

I now waited patiently, for the prominent feature of innocence is forbearance, until Mr. Aſhgrove ſhould declare the meaning of his myſterious conduct. Ah, Frances! little did I ſuſpect the origin of his cenſure; little did I ſuppoſe that the calumny of an unknown enemy would ſhake that firmneſs of mind which I attributed to Edward Aſhgrove.

While I was muſing on the ever-varying tablet of my deſtiny, Mr. Aſhgrove returned, and without farther heſitation, preſented me a newſpaper; my eyes ran ſwiftly over the columns,

my

my heart beat with ſtrange and propl et c ſenſations, till with horror ſcarcely to be deſcribed, I read the following paragraph:

'The *chere amie* of a certain noble-'man, who is ſaid to have cauſed the 'lamented death of his amiable Lady, 'has been doing penance for her crimes 'in the ſolitudes of the New Foreſt! 'Her clerical inamorato is recovered 'from the wound which the fair aſſaſſin 'inflicted; and now purſues the old 'routine of diſſipation with new and 'augmented avidity, while the penitent 'Gertrude is left

'To think on what has paſſed, and ſigh alone.'

The paper fell from my hand, and I ſtood fixed with the ſtupor of aſtoniſhment evident in my countenance. Never did a convicted criminal exhibit ſtronger traits of guilt than I did at this agonizing moment. Though not wholly convicted

victed of the atrocious conduct which calumny had reported, I was ſtill in a certain degree culpable; and the conſciouſneſs that the paragraph alluded to me, and that my name was now made the ſubject of public animadverſion, overwhelmed me with ſhame and diſtreſs which I could neither conceal nor endure with fortitude.

The bluſh of confuſion, and the pallid hue of terror are not always the unequivocal ſigns of conſcious iniquity. The idea of an accuſation, at which the feelings of a proud mind revolt, will ſometimes produce a ſuffuſion which bears the ſemblance of ſhame; were I ſuſpected of having committed murder, I ſhould turn pale with horror, or become red with indignation. But the ſilent proof of an agitated mind would ſhortly be ſucceeded by a calm and dignified diſdain, and the divine ſpirit of conſcious integrity would harmonize my feelings,

feelings, even to the moſt placid tenour. Ah, Frances! how painful is the ſmalleſt deviation from unreſerved and generous candour; how ſeverely does the contemplative mind ſuffer for the practice of deceit, even though it be not the aſſociate of criminality!

Never, during my period of probationary ſuffering, did I feel ſo acutely the ſenſe of ſhame, as at this diſtreſſing moment. I knew not what to ſay or how to act. I could not deny the leading events of the allegations which had met my eyes, and overwhelmed me with affliction; neither would my haughty ſoul placidly ſubmit to the imputation, without an endeavour to prove the degree of criminality of which I ſtood tacitly convicted. The degree of criminality! Oh, my friend—do I then exiſt to own myſelf criminal? Am I, by the perverſe decrees of fate, ordained to plead ſelf-accuſed and ſelf-convicted?

Ill-

Ill-ſtarred, unhappy Gertrude! Ungenerous, barbarous Denmore! Thou whoſe early fondneſs firſt told me to indulge the ſenſibility of my nature; thou whoſe guiding hand led me along the flowery paths of life; opened to my view new and perpetually pleaſing ſcenes; ſoothed me with promiſes of kindneſs; taught me year after year to cheriſh the falſe flatterer Hope, at laſt to abandon me and my fortune to ſhame, deſpair, and an untimely grave! What are your thoughts? Where is that mental reprover Conſcience? When, oh! when will the moment of reflection come, and wake thee to compunction?

LETTER LXXIII.

The Same to the Same.

July 16, 1797.

SEVERAL minutes paſſed, before I had courage to break the ſilence of reflection. Mr. Aſhgrove ſeemed more ſorrowful than his ſiſter, who ſtood with her eyes bent on the ground, and her arm leaning againſt the window. As for myſelf, Frances, I knew not where to look, or how to addreſs them: the newſpaper ſtill lay on the carpet; and every heart was evidently agitated; till at length, with an effort which was prompted by deſpair, I reſumed the converſation.

"It has ever been my deſtiny to ſuffer by falſe appearances: I have in vain endeavoured to combat the ſad

routine of misfortunes, and to bear with patience the perplexities of exiſtence. From my infancy I have ſtruggled along a myſterious and mazy path; I have ſince wandered in vain through all the changes of my tedious journey, and have found at every turn ſome new ſorrow to encounter. Hitherto I have met with perverſe and uncandid natures; I hoped however, in your friendſhip, to repoſe my ſorrows, and in your ſociety to forget the world's unkindneſs."—I could not proceed: my full heart throbbed; but my tongue loſt the power of utterance.

"Indeed, Gertrude, I promiſed myſelf much felicity in your eſteem," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove, ſighing deeply. Edward was ſilent; but his features were all-eloquent. I felt a renovated courage, when I beheld the benignant ſmile, the impreſſively penetrating look, the mildly contemplative *tout enſemble* of

of his manly and ingenuous countenance.

"This is a moment too precious," continued I, "to be loſt in uſeleſs or vague explanations. I will briefly reveal what has paſſed to authorize ſuſpicion, and to form the baſis of that calumny which compels me to be explicit." I now, in as few words as the circumſtances would permit, unfolded the perplexities of my fate, from the moment of my quitting Ireland to that in which I told my ſtory. I obſerved the varying emotions of ſurpriſe, doubt, pity, horror, and regret, in the minds of my attentive liſteners: but the frequent tears which Miſs Aſhgrove gave to my ſorrows, ſeemed the balm for my deſponding heart; while the manly indignation which ſhot forth from the penetrating eyes of Edward, inſpired me with hopes, that he deemed me leſs criminal than unhappy.

As ſoon as I had concluded my melancholy ſtory, Mr. Aſhgrove, with a reſpectful humility, demanded my pardon. "Forgive me, Miſs St. Leger," ſaid he; "I conjure you to forgive me. The calumny is evident: your wrongs are infinite; and though, too raſhly, my words offended you, my arm, my life, ſhall be devoted to your ſervice." I bowed my head, and thanked him.

"But mark me, amiable Gertrude," continued Mr. Aſhgrove; "I from this hour relinquiſh every hope beyond that of meriting your friendſhip. I perceive, for it requires no extraordinary degree of penetration to diſcover, that you love Lord Denmore; that he has given you every reaſon to ſuppoſe the attachment mutual; that he is one of thoſe vain, imperious tyrants, who are never happy but in exerciſing the power to torture thoſe beings, whom they have had the art to faſcinate. Thank Hea-

ven! I have heard your ſtory; I have heard it with a mixture of indignation and pity. Your injuries ſhall be avenged; and this preſuming, this exalted deſtroyer of your repoſe, ſhall be taught to own, that there is no rank above the dignity of honourable feeling." The tone of voice, and the expreſſion of Mr. Aſhgrove's features, while he ſpoke, convinced me that he was no diſſembler. After a few moments of ſilent reflection, he continued:

"If, after what has paſſed, Lord Denmore meditates an union with another woman, he is a villain; for there is little difference betwixt the ſeducer who robs the unſuſpecting victim of her honour, and the ſubtle deſpoiler who enchains the heart, merely to exerciſe a ſeries of deſpotic tortures. This has been Lord Denmore's aim; and he has ſucceeded hitherto, becauſe you have had

had no friend to reſcue, no protector to adviſe you. He has tyrannized over the being whom he has bowed to abject debaſement; and, like a coward, inſulted the object of his purſuit, becauſe it had not force to reſiſt perſecution. Theſe are beings whom the world names noble; theſe are what we call the higher orders of men; the deſpots who look down upon the low-born, honourable, feeling boſom." I made no comment; but the zeal and generoſity which prompted Mr. Aſhgrove's mind, filled my heart with gratitude, bordering on enthuſiaſm.

We were interrupted by a ſudden indiſpoſition which caſt an alarming paleneſs over Mary's features. She ſeemed faint, and aroſe to quit the room. Edward and myſelf ſupported her arm, till ſhe reached her chamber, where a torrent of tears relieved her

inquietude. I was at a loſs to diſcover the cauſe of this new and violent agitation; neither could my perſuaſions nor my fears induce her to reveal it.

During the remainder of the day ſhe never quitted her apartment: ſhe wept and ſighed inceſſantly. I attributed her ſorrow to the apprehenſions which ſhe entertained of ſome future quarrel between Edward and Lord Denmore; and I aſſured her, that I would rather yield to every ſpecies of inſult and oppreſſion, than permit her brother again, in my defence, to riſk a life ſo precious.

From that period Miſs Aſhgrove's malady has viſibly augmented. Her frame is waſted almoſt to a ſhadow, and her mind depreſſed to the very miſery of deſpondence. Ah, Frances! let the philanthropic traveller through this bewildering journey of exiſtence

ſteal

ſteal away the thorns which beſtrew the path, and which never fail to wound the female wanderer: pity will then be the aſſociate of courage; and no tear, but that of grateful joy, will gliſten on the cheek of frail and helpleſs woman.

Adieu: The occupation of my pen muſt yield to the duties of friendſhip. You have long ſince taught me, that, in the very worſt of mental conflicts, the celeſtial power of ſympathy can ſooth us into patience.

LETTER LXXIV.

The Same to the Same.

Salt-hill, July 20, 1797.

To-morrow we proceed to Briſtol; Miſs Aſhgrove's health demands immediate aid, and all other conſiderations prove trivial, when placed in competition with her peril. Since the period of *eclairciſſement*, Edward's conduct has been marked by a reſpectful reſerve, which charms and gratifies my heart; I now feel my boſom lightened of that burden which conſcious deception rendered ſcarcely ſupportable; and, with fortitude I await the diſcloſure of that tablet, on which fate has tranſcribed the future events of my exiſtence.

LETTER LXXV.

The Same to the Same.

Salt-hill, July 21, 1797.

THE newſpaper of this day announces that Lord Denmore is on the point of marriage with Miſs Stanley! I have read the fatal intelligence—it is engraved upon my brain! Oh, Frances! Frances! the hour of trial is come, and I ſhrink like a coward!

Would to God! Lord Denmore had fallen in his *rencontre* with Edward Aſhgrove! His annihilation would have leſs afflicted me than his union with another.

It ſhall not be; I will try if there be truth in Edward's friendſhip; Lord Denmore may periſh, but he ſhall not be the huſband of Miſs Stanley.

I am agitated, wild, diſtracted,—the indignant ſpirit of my gallant father infuſes its reſiſting power through all the fibres of my heart; I will triumph, or I will expire. This is the criſis of my fate! The deed which gives Lord Denmore to another, will ſeal my miſery for ever—Should it not be avoided! Shall the ſun brighten on their union, while all around me is dark and deſolate?—No! never! never!

Denmore, thy gloomy hour ſhall come; though Gertrude, the perſecuted Gertrude, be thy companion to oblivion.

I have meditated; 'tis now the time to act. Does the ſhipwrecked mariner yield to the ſwelling ſurge, without a reſiſting effort to repel it? Shall I bend to the approaching ſtorm, without even ſeeking a ſhelter from its violence? Anſwer theſe queſtions.

Oh,

Oh, Frances! how terrible are the conflicts of my ſoul! How rapid are my thoughts, how ſtrong my reſentment! How certain my deſpair!

I ſcarcely ſee what I write: every object ſeems dim, every proſpect gloomy. The fates are buſy, and they ſuit my mind to the perſpective they preſent: the dark perſpective! where the ſpirit of my father urges me on to vengeance.

What is this inſtinctive impulſe? I ſhudder, while I feel its power terribly irreſiſtible. Oh! could the ſainted authors of my being behold their wretched offspring taunted by the world, expoſed to every peril; wounded by every inſult; deſtined to drain the bitter cup of ſorrow; to bend beneath the ſcorn of pride; the prejudice of ignorance; the arrogance of vulgar ſouls, and the pity of the oſtentatious. Would they not reviſit this ſublunary

chaos, and, in viſionary horrors, haunt the pillow of Lord Denmore?

I will not indulge theſe melancholy ruminations. The encroachments of penſive ſorrow enervate the mind; and I ſhall want a more powerful aſſociate than either tenderneſs or pity.

An awful, but penetrating horror fills my ſoul! Frances, my ſpirit grows firm by intuition. I will prevent Lord Denmore's marriage, or I will ſeek a refuge from my ſorrows in the grave!

LETTER LXXVI.

The Same to the Same.

London, July 23, 1797.

When I aroſe on the morning after I finiſhed my laſt letter, I was informed, to my unutterable ſurpriſe, that Mr. Aſhgrove, without any previous intimation either to his ſiſter or myſelf, had at the break of day ſet out for London. My aſtoniſhment could only be equalled by the doubts and fears which ruſhed into my heart; and while they ſtruggled with its indignant feelings, ſoftened them even to ſolicitude. Ah, Frances! dare I confeſs my weakneſs? dare I confide to your ſympathiſing boſom, the various, the tender anxieties I then felt for the ſafety of that being whom, not twelve hours ago, I meditated to deſtroy? I

already fancied that I beheld him lifeleſs. I ſaw, amidſt the viſionary horrors of my brain, his form inanimate; his features fixed in the rigid ſpells of petrifying death. All reſentment for his paſt unkindneſs was forgotten; and I beheld the noble, the generous, the too faſcinating Denmore, the guardian, the friend, that I once loved and honoured.

How ſeverely will my raſh reſentment recoil upon myſelf, ſhould Lord Denmore periſh! What agonies will poſſeſs my mind, ſhould Edward, in my defence, embrue his hands in the blood of a fellow-creature! How often have I execrated thoſe trifling, thoughtleſs women, who, for a ſuppoſed offence, or an indiſcretion, frequently the effect of folly or inebriety, would involve a beloved object in the perils of a duel. Miſtaken is that vanity which exalts itſelf upon the ruin of another; and hateful to the benign and philanthropic

breaſt

breaſt is the promoter of ſuch a conteſt. Then, Frances, what am I? At once the *protegée*, the adopted charge, the enemy, and the conſpirator againſt the life of Lord Denmore. With my own hand I could have annihilated the apoſtate; but it ſeems more than ſacrilege to deſtroy him by any other.

We have been twenty-four hours in London, but can obtain no intelligence reſpecting either Lord Denmore or Mr. Aſhgrove. I have made inquiries at the houſe lately occupied by Miſs Stanley; but, by her having quitted Stratford-Place theſe ten days, I could diſcover no clue to the developement of their future intentions. I know that Edward is raſh and impetuous; that Lord Denmore is ſtern and unforgiving: I anticipate a thouſand evils; and I almoſt fear that they are inevitable.

Why did I diſcloſe the ſorrows of my heart? why did I complain of that injuſtice,

injuſtice, which a warm and honourable mind could not fail to execrate, if not to puniſh? At the moment when I told my ſtory, I thought that I hated Lord Denmore: my ſenſes were alive to his unkindneſs, my ſoul revolted at the idea of tamely yielding to them: as I proceeded in the diſcloſure which my fame demanded, my reſentment warmed, my boſom throbbed with the alternate agonies of regret and indignation; and all the finer, purer paſſions of the ſoul were vanquiſhed in the conflict. I have ſlept ſince; I have reflected; and I am once more ſenſitively alive to all the horrors that aſſail me.

I am going in ſearch of Mrs. Sewell: perhaps ſhe can give me ſome intelligence. Another night of agonizing thought will ſever me to madneſs. Heaven guard me from the trial!

LETTER LXXVII.

The Same to the Same.

London, July 24, 1797.

DURING the whole of yeſterday evening I wandered about, like a being forlorn and hopeleſs. Mary, though ſcarcely able to ſuſtain her feeble form, was the companion of my reſearches; and it was near midnight when we returned to our lodging. Mrs. Sewell was not to be found; and the only intelligence which we obtained at Lord Denmore's was, that he had, ſeveral days before, quitted London.

On our arrival in town we hired a lodging at the houſe of an artificial floriſt in one of the ſtreets leading from Piccadilly. The miſtreſs of it was a ſample of thoſe beings who think well of the

world]

world as long as its inhabitants promote their intereſt. She was extremely happy in having the power to accommodate us, becauſe ſhe did not fail to take advantage of our evidently forlorn ſituation; and ſhe hoped that every thing her houſe produced would prove uſeful and agreeable, becauſe ſhe never expected again to find lodgers whoſe ſituation would ſo well ſuit her purpoſe, on the ſcore of extortion. Theſe motives did not at firſt ſtrike our minds; for we were too deeply affected by the object of our purſuit, for any leſſer conſideration to intereſt our feelings.

On our return yeſterday evening from the perambulations which anxiety occaſioned, it was near twelve o'clock. Mrs. Ferret opened the door, and with a look of inquiſitive reproof remarked that the hour was rather unſeaſonable, and that ſhe never went to reſt till all her family retired to their chambers.

"Perhaps,"

"Perhaps," added ſhe, "you had buſineſs of importance, or you have met with ſome unlucky accident? There is much danger in remaining ſo late abroad."

"We were under no apprehenſions," ſaid I. "The ſtreets are full of paſſengers; and many of the ſhops are ſtill open."

"You walked then," cried Mrs. Ferret, as ſhe lighted us up ſtairs. "Perhaps you have been at one of the Theatres?"

"At neither," ſaid I.

"It is a pity that your friends, where you paſſed the evening, did not ſend a ſervant to take care of you," remarked our inquiſitive landlady.

"We have not been viſiting," replied Miſs Aſhgrove.

"It is but a dark night for walking," added Mrs. Ferret, entering our apartment, and placing the candles on the table:

table: then, with a look of penetrating curioſity, ſhe continued: "Moſt probably you have ſupped."

"My friend is an invalid, and I ſeldom eat at night," anſwered I.

"Perhaps your health is not as good as you would wiſh it. The country has a purer air than the metropolis; and I preſume you are not Londoners."

"We chiefly reſide at ſome diſtance from town," ſaid I, beginning to undreſs myſelf.

"I envy you," ſaid Mrs. Ferret; "for I once lived in Dorſetſhire, near the ſea-coaſt, and I found the change, when I reviſited theſe regions of miſt and ſmoke, ſcarcely ſupportable. Perhaps you have been uſed to the refreſhing fragrance of ſea-breezes, or lived on ſome beautiful hill or extenſive plain: the ſudden alteration of atmoſphere cannot fail to affect you."

"I have

"I have always enjoyed tolerable health in the metropolis," ſaid I.

"You have reſided here before then? I thought your air was too poliſhed for that of a country miſs," ſaid Mrs. Ferret, addreſſing me. Then turning towards Miſs Aſhgrove, with a ſigh ſhe added: "But this poor ſweet young lady ſeems in ſad ſpirits; perhaps ſhe has ſome cauſe for uneaſineſs; loſt a beloved friend, or parted from her huſband?"

"She is not married," ſaid I.

"Dear me! what a pity!" cried Mrs. Ferret: "but parents and relations are ſometimes our greateſt enemies, particularly in affairs of the heart." She pauſed; but no anſwer being made to gratify her inquiſitive propenſity, ſhe continued:

"Well! London is a charming place for low ſpirits, that cannot be denied: and for people of fortune there are various kinds of amuſement. It is only

to folks like myſelf that great cities are unpleaſant: we are obliged to toil for the advantage of others."

"And a little for your own," ſaid I.

"Why, the poor muſt live," replied Mrs. Ferret; "but you ladies, who are independent, and have no cauſe to work for your bread, you cannot judge how hardly we earn our ſubſiſtence."

"Yours is an elegant and pleaſing occupation," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove, by this time nearly undreſſed.

"True; but how much happier are you young ladies of fortune; though, to be ſure, there are ſuch plagues as old fathers who are ſtingy, and guardians who are watchful; but youth is ever vigilant; and in this great ſcene of buſtle, a purſuit would ſcarcely be ſucceſsful."

"A purſuit!" repeated I, with aſtoniſhment.

"Yes,"

"Yes," continued Mrs. Ferret, following up the queſtion: "I mean, where young ladies run away from their friends, or wiſh to break through the barriers of family reſtraint. But I am ſure your relations are too wiſe to reduce either of you to ſuch a deſperate remedy; for this is a ſad place, unleſs people are well known, and have many acquaintances to adviſe them."

"We know very few people in London," ſaid I.

"The fewer the better," replied Mrs. Ferret, "provided they are but perſons of rank and fortune: of courſe your connections are in the higher circles. Perhaps I know ſome of them; I work for many ladies of the firſt faſhion."

"Very poſſibly!" was my laconic anſwer.

"I beg your pardon, Miſs. I did not mean to pry impertinently into your concerns," ſaid our landlady, viſibly

bly piqued by my abrupt reply. "All perſons, both rich and poor, are the beſt judges of their own conduct; and perhaps you have particular reaſons for that reſerve, which, to a more ſuſpicious obſerver, would indeed appear rather ſingular."

"I wiſh only to be quiet, and to reſt," ſaid I peeviſhly.

"I am gone," cried Mrs. Ferret. "I do not wiſh to diſturb you. Perhaps you have travelled a great way, or your mind has been agitated; in either caſe, ſleep is a wonderful reſtorer." She was going, when I requeſted that ſhe would order her ſervant to knock at our chamber-door at eight o'clock.

"At eight o'clock!" repeated our landlady, ſetting down the candleſtick, with evident ſurpriſe. "Heavens! what a Gothic hour! what can you poſſibly have to do ſo early in the morning? Why, I never riſe myſelf till

near nine; I, who have an occupation to follow. Indeed, one would imagine you lived in Queen Elizabeth's days; and I ſhould as ſoon have expected that you would have ordered a ſirloin of beef for breakfaſt, as that you would think of quitting your pillow before noon."

"It muſt be a matter of little conſequence to you," ſaid I, vexed almoſt to ill-humour by the woman's impertinent queſtions. "I will therefore thank you to do as I deſire you."

"You would like to have tea in the morning, or perhaps you breakfaſt abroad? ſaid Mrs. Ferret pertly. "One would ſuppoſe that you meant to make your firſt meal at Whitechapel, by the time of your riſing." I now perceived that we had no night-lamp, and requeſted the landlady to provide one.

"Willingly," ſaid ſhe. "Nothing can be more uſeful in London. We have

have frequent houſebreaking in this neighbourhood, and perhaps you have more money or jewels with you, than you would like to loſe."

"No great quantity of either," anſwered I: "but I am accuſtomed to ſleep with a light in my chamber; and uſe is every thing."

"You have been tenderly brought up, no doubt," ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "your parents were indulgent as they were rich."

"I never knew my parents," ſaid I, ſighing.

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Ferret; "that was ſad indeed: but there are circumſtances which reconcile us even to the greateſt ſeverities of fortune. Perhaps your father fell in the ſervice of his country?"

"He did."

"And your mother could not ſurvive his loſs! Poor lady! Well, but you have

have brothers and ſiſters to conſole you?"

"Neither," ſaid I, ſighing.

"Well, one ſometimes finds as much kindneſs in more diſtant kindred, ſuch as uncles and aunts, and couſins," ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "beſides, you have a fortune of courſe, and you don't want any body's friendſhip; and, to ſpeak the truth, we often find the neareſt relations the coldeſt friends."

"I rely upon myſelf alone," ſaid I; "and little trouble my mind about the conduct of others."

"You are right," anſwered my landlady. "You have the independent ſoul of an Engliſhwoman; and I honour its feelings."

"Pardon me," ſaid I; "for I am Iriſh."

"'Tis all one," cried Mrs. Ferret. "One King governs both, God bleſs him! and we are of courſe one people."

"Pray Heaven we may always remain ſo," ſaid I; "as far as an union of mind, and a love of rational liberty, can make us."

"Amen!" exclaimed Mrs. Ferret. Then, taking my hand, and ſhaking it cordially, ſhe added: "I perceive you are one of the right ſort; you are for liberty and a clear conſcience."

"That liberty which leaves the conſcience unſpotted is one of our greateſt bleſſings," ſaid I: "for it is then dear to humanity, and at the ſame time the ſafeguard of the laws. May ſuch liberty ever be the proudeſt boaſt of Britons!" Mrs. Ferret hemmed, and heſitated; and then again taking up the candleſtick, proceeded towards the door, where, after pauſing ſome minutes, ſhe bade us good night, and to my infinite joy departed. You ſhall hear from me again by the next poſt: till then, Frances, farewell.

LETTER LXXVIII.

The Same to the Same.

London, July 25, 1797.

We paſſed an unquiet night. My ſolicitude for the ſafety of Lord Denmore was not more poignant than that which Miſs Aſhgrove experienced on account of Edward's ſudden expedition. She knew that every thing fatal was to be apprehended, from the determination of a mind ardent, and at the ſame time prone to irritability. My fears were of equal magnitude from a thorough conviction that Lord Denmore's diſpoſition was reſentful, as his ſenſe of injury was acute. From a meeting on hoſtile ground between two ſuch mortals, and for the ſecond time, every thing dreadful was to be apprehended.

We were both awake before the appointed hour when Mrs. Ferret's ſervant had been requeſted to call us. I roſe from my bed to make tea for my ſick friend; whoſe languor every hour augmented, and whoſe depreſſion of mind now gave ſymptoms that agonized my heart.

We had ſcarcely began our breakfaſt, when our ever-attentive landlady entered the chamber, with "Can I be of any uſe to you, ladies? How do you purpoſe paſſing the day? Do you dine at home? or have you any meſſage to ſend, that I can convey?"

"I ſhould be ſorry to give you ſo much trouble," ſaid I.

"The pleaſure will repay the labour," replied Mrs. Ferret, taking her ſeat, and looking with curious eyes around the apartment. "I am going," added ſhe, after a pauſe of ſome minutes, "to the fartheſt end of Portman-ſquare: perhaps

haps you have friends in that quarter of the town." I bluſhed, and dared not meet her eyes, which I well knew would, ſeeing my confuſion, be fixed upon me.

"I have ſome *bouquets* to take home for Lord Daffodil. His Lordſhip never pays leſs than a guinea for a ſingle primroſe: they ſuit his Lordſhip's complexion, for he *rouges* very highly."

"Heavens! impoſſible!" exclaimed I.

"You ſeem ſurpriſed," ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "but the fine gentlemen of modern life are as vain of their complexions as the beaux of Congreve's time were of their amber-headed canes and ſhoulder-loads of peruke. The toilet of a male coquette now-a-days would far ſurpaſs that of a Ninon de l'Enclos."

"I can ſcarcely believe it," anſwered I; "for a fine complexion is not by any means a trait of manly beauty."

"You miſtake the matter entirely," cried the facetious floriſt. "Our men of *ton* aim not at the tranſparent roſe, nor the ſoft ſilky lily; they paint brown; and, by the aid of deeper tints, aſſume that healthful hue, which diſſipation has ſtolen from the attributes of Nature."

"Can ſuch beings hope to be beloved by women of underſtanding?" ſaid I.

"Nothing can be more remote from their wiſhes," anſwered my landlady: "love they conſider as the bane of happineſs; and women of underſtanding have long ſince been voted bores, *nem. con.* by all the fraternity."

"How do they paſs their time?" ſaid I.

"All the morning in dreſſing, and in taking pains to appear negligent," replied Mrs. Ferret: "all the day, till dinner, in walking about the ſtreets at the weſt end of the town; all the even-

ing

ing at the opera or the theatres; and all the night at the moſt faſhionable gaming tables."

"Aſtoniſhing!" exclaimed I.

"But I ſhould not diſcloſe the ſecrets of my beſt cuſtomers," ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "for I have a liſt of about ſixteen, who are annually four hundred pounds upon my books for perfumes and coſmetics, which they uſe themſelves; and bouquets, wreaths, French trinkets, fans, gloves, and feathers, which they preſent to their favourites."

"So partial to their own merit, I did not ſuſpect that they entertained any predilection for other objects," ſaid I.

"Appearances muſt be kept up," replied Mrs. Ferret. "Beſides they cannot expect to have the *entre* of faſhionable houſes for nothing, while the fair hoſteſſes can let their green cloth for fifty guineas a-night free of expences."

"I do not comprehend you," ſaid I.

"You never play then, I preſume? but you have probably been at one of theſe faſhionable aſſemblies."

"Never at one which anſwers your deſcription," ſaid I.

"You have not paſſed a winter in London lately then?" ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "You know Mrs. Paroli and the Counteſs of Roundabout?"

"Never heard of either."

"Then you do not read the newſpapers. Perhaps your ſtudies have a more obſtruſe tendency. You read Sacred Hiſtory, or moral eſſays.

"Sometimes both."

"Then you are not of the New School. You believe in the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, and hope for happineſs in a future ſtate?"

"Moſt implicitly." Mrs. Ferret hemmed and pauſed to find a new queſtion.

"Religion

"Religion is the only reſource for an unquiet mind," ſaid ſhe, raiſing her eyes and ſighing fervently. "You are probably a catholic by your country?"

"No, I am a proteſtant."

"Now we talk of catholics, what dreadful carnage there has been in Paris; of courſe you have travelled?"

"Not far."

"Perhaps you would like to viſit the Continent. I know a Lady of high rank who would be charmed with ſuch a companion."

"Indeed! may I aſk her name?"

"You muſt excuſe me. I do not know enough of your connections and ſituation in life to place ſo much confidence in you. The lady I mean wiſhes to find a young perſon of family and education to make the *tour* of Italy."

"So far I anſwer her deſcription."

"She muſt be independent, and of unexceptionable character. Speak

French, play on the harp, and take views of the different places through which ſhe is deſtined to travel."

"All this I can promiſe," ſaid I.

"She muſt be unmarried, and ſupplied with ſuch a wardrobe as will enable her to mix with the beſt company. If ſhe has trinkets and jewels, ſo much the better."

"I have a few of each; and would with pleaſure undertake the expedition."

"You muſt refer me to perſons of credit for a confirmation of what you aſſert," ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "for, to tell you the truth, I am authorized to make terms with ſuch a perſon, whenever I find one; and as the lady purpoſes ſetting out in a few weeks, the ſooner we arrange the buſineſs the better."

"You will let me know the perſon's name and connections," ſaid I.

"That

"That I am not allowed to do," anſwered Mrs. Ferret: "but, to prove that I wiſh to accommodate you as far as lies in my power, I will procure you an interview with the lady at no diſtant period."

"I require no greater indulgence," ſaid I.

Miſs Aſhgrove, who conſidered all I ſaid as a jeſt, merely to miſlead the inquiſitive floriſt, ſmiled as I glanced towards her; Mrs. Ferret, completely ſatisfied with her knowledge of my proſpects and ſituation, now turned the artillery of interrogation againſt my companion. "You will ſcarcely like to leave your friend," ſaid ſhe: "perhaps ſhe would not eaſily find a ſubſtitute whoſe value would compenſate for a loſs of ſuch importance." Then lookingly earneſtly at Miſs Aſhgrove, ſhe ſoftened her voice to a tone of plaintive ſolicitude, and added, "Your ſituation—"

"Is that of a weary liſtener, who is not inclined to anſwer impertinent queſtions," interrupted Mary, with a voice quick and impatient.

"Well! you need not be ſo ſnappiſh, Miſs," ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "I am ſure it is no buſineſs of mine."

"True," replied Miſs Aſhgrove; "and therefore I requeſt that you will leave it to thoſe whom it may concern."

"So I will then," retorted our landlady; "for it cannot intereſt my feelings whether you live or die."

"I ſhould ſuppoſe but little. Therefore as I ſhall not prolong exiſtence by your kindneſs, I conjure you not to kill me by your loquacity." Mrs. Ferret was both diſconcerted and offended by this abrupt termination of her chapter of anecdotes; and with a half ſneer, aroſe to quit the chamber.

"I ſhall ſee the lady whom I mentioned probably this morning," ſaid ſhe, elevating her eye-brows, and looking

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ing over her ſhoulder with an air of importance; "and as you appear to be deſerving of encouragement, and capable of feeling any interference that may better your ſituation, I ſhall endeavour to procure you an interview ſpeedily. As for your waſpiſh friend, who ſeems worn out with ſpleen and ill-nature, I ſhall only ſay, that I am certain ſhe is ſome low-bred upſtart, by her conſequential airs; and I would venture to bet my life, that ſhe has either eloped from an angry father, or been turned out of doors by a diſguſted huſband." This malignant innuendo again failed to extort a ſatisfactory anſwer; and the fair inquiſitor darted out of the room, both enraged and diſappointed.

I cloſe my letter, to recommence our purſuit. You ſhall ſoon know the reſult. Heaven grant that it may prove propitious!

LETTER LXXIX.

The Same to the Same.

London, July 28, 1797.

AGAIN we exerted every effort to diſcover the new abode of our good friend Mrs. Sewell; but in vain: ſhe had quitted London ſhortly after the Ducheſs of Aldborough's death; and we could obtain no intelligence concerning her preſent ſituation. Our reſearches reſpecting Miſs Stanley proved equally unſucceſsful and fatiguing; and it was near ſun-ſet before we thought of returning to our lodgings.

Paſſing along one of the ſtreets in the neighbourhood of Berkley-ſquare, while we were deeply engaged in converſation, I felt a gentle preſſure on my

ſhoulder, and, turning ſuddenly round, inſtantly perceived that it was given by the hand of the perſecuting Mrs. Blonzely. With eyes widely opened, and a ſmile inſolently ſarcaſtic, ſhe exclaimed, "Have I once more found you, my fair runaway? Where have you been, and how have you paſſed your time, ſince you practiſed upon my credulity?" I thought that I ſhould ſink upon the pavement. Miſs Aſhgrove's countenance betrayed the moſt extreme ſurpriſe; and I felt my cheek reddened over with confuſion.

"Come, come, none of your pretended ſimplicity," continued Mrs. Blonzely: "you have played the part ſo often, that it is become perfectly diſguſting. What became of my two hundred pound note? and where is your vagabond lover, who promiſed to procure the money for me?"

I made no anſwer. She continued:

"You

"You may look aſhamed indeed, when you behold a perſon whom you impoſed on ſo ſhamefully; and who has met with ſuch an ungrateful reward for having ſaved your reputation by denying your intrigue with Sir Hector Upas."

"You are certainly miſtaken in this young lady's perſon," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove, ſhrinking from Mrs. Blonzely, who by this time had ſeized her arm, and walked cloſe beſide us.

"Miſtaken! No, no. I remember her pretty puritanical face to my ſorrow," ſaid Mrs. Blonzely. "Though ſhe did once perſuade me out of my ſenſes, by making me the dupe of her pretended innocence, ſhe will have good luck to practiſe a ſecond time upon my credulity. My name is Blonzely. She knows me well enough, and was glad to find a ſhelter under my roof, when ſhe was turned out of Lady Denmore's for intriguing with her huſband." At the

concluſion

concluſion of theſe words Mary's cheek became pale as aſhes. I knew not what to ſay, or how to act; and I plainly perceived, that unleſs I could eſcape, my expoſure would be terrible; for my accuſer ſpoke in a loud and taunting tone, and ſeemed determined to inſult me.

Mrs. Blonzely now withdrew her arm from Miſs Aſhgrove; and taking the inſide of the pavement, laid faſt hold on mine. "When did you ſee the Nabob?" ſaid ſhe; and how have you ſettled your quarrel with his lady?"

"I never had any," ſaid I. "Lady Upas was uniformly my friend, my protectreſs."

Mrs. Blonzely laughed aloud. "Oh," interrupted ſhe, with a look of aſtoniſhment, "I now perceive that you are a ſtranger to all that has happened. Where have you buried yourſelf ſince Mr. Treville releaſed you from priſon? and how

how did you get over the ſtrange ſtory about Lady Denmore's ſudden death, and your jealous, deſperate conduct towards her ſeducer; though, if report may be credited, you had much concern in the buſineſs; for by your aſſiſtance they eloped from the Ducheſs of Aldborough's. I gueſſed that ſome miſchief would happen, when you came whimpering, and begging me to protect you."

"You cannot know this woman!" whiſpered Miſs Aſhgrove. "I have often heard her name mentioned, and always with abhorrence." My tongue faultered as I replied, "For Heavens ſake have patience, and I will tell you all."

"I heard of you not long ſince," cried Mrs. Blonzely, with a voice both audible and inſolent. "You were only a few nights ſince at Madame Leſage's; but your ingratitude was only equal to your

your effrontery; for you pretended not to recollect her too, though ſhe aſſiſted you in making your eſcape when you was hiſſed and hooted out of the Theatre for your indecent conduct."

"I can bear this no longer," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove; "and unleſs you will command this woman to leave us, I ſhall faint upon the pavement."

"After being ſeen with Miſs St. Leger, you can have nothing to bluſh at," ſaid Mrs. Blonzely. "But probably you are deceived, as I was; and ſhe has had the addreſs to cajole you, as ſhe has many hundreds beſide. The young Lady is no novice in the art of aſſuming characters; ſhe would make an excellent actreſs."

By the time that ſhe had done ſpeaking, we entered Piccadilly. I dared not proceed towards our lodgings, leſt the perſevering ſlanderer ſhould fruſtrate my projected continental journey, by her

her interference with Mrs. Ferret. So perplexing was our ſituation, that we ſcarcely knew what ſtreets we traverſed, till we found ourſelves in the middle of Pall-Mall. The evening was beautifully inviting, and the pavement crowded with paſſengers, all of whom looked at us with evident amazement; till, turning the corner of John-ſtreet, to my unutterable chagrin, my eyes ſuddenly encountered thoſe of the convenient Mr. Scamper.

"Ha! my little Gertrude! From what obſcure nook in the habitable globe have you ventured forth, to do more miſchief?" ſaid the accompliſhed vagabond. "But," continued he, nodding ſignificantly at Mrs. Blonzely, "I need not queſtion your motives, ſeeing you in ſuch good company." Then, lifting up Miſs Aſhgrove's veil, and looking boldly under it, he added: "And you, my pretty nun! what idol

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do you worſhip? Plutus or Cupid! Faith, you are but a drooping lily; though, in the hot-bed of faſhion, you may yet bloom with conſiderable *eclat*; for languiſhing beauty is grown into celebrity, ſince the elopement of the dying Lady Denmore."

"Barbarous pleaſantry!" exclaimed I with involuntary horror.

"Wonderful morality!" retorted Mr. Scamper. "How long have you learnt to think ſo delicately? You told another tale, when you cajoled Sir Hector, coquetted with my Lord, and at the ſame time carried on a private adventure with Mr. Treville." My indignation increaſed with every word he uttered; till, looking under my bonnet with a fixed ſtare of impertinence, Mr. Scamper added: "You may endeavour to be angry, and to frown, and to aſſume a conſequential auſterity; but I am not in the ſmalleſt degree alarmed. You

You have no piſtol now, my pretty Amazon."

This remark evidently awakened new ſurpriſe in Miſs Aſhgrove's mind. For I had omitted to confeſs my wounding Mr. Treville at Edgware, and the circumſtance of my being preſent at the period of Lady Denmore's death. The language uttered by Mrs. Blonzely, and ſo rapidly repeated by Mr. Scamper, ſerved to confirm the paragraph in the newſpaper; and Mary's confidence at laſt ſeemed wholly to forſake her.

The evening being nearly cloſed, we entertained new hopes of eluding our companion in the duſky light, which was not yet aided by the partial glare of the ſtreet lamps. We had twice perambulated St. James's-ſquare, where, after a brief conference with Mrs. Blonzely, Mr. Scamper took his leave. My joy was infinite, when I found that we were free from one of our perſecutors; and

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the ſatisfaction was conſiderably augmented, when, in a few minutes after, Mrs. Blonzely alſo wiſhed us a pleaſant evening.

We had ſcarcely congratulated ourſelves on the departure of our tormentors, when, croſſing the top of St. James's-ſtreet, we were overtaken by a foot-paſſenger, who calling on our names, requeſted us to ſtop. It was Edward Aſhgrove. My joy was infinite; but Mary's was too exquiſite for her feeble ſtate to ſuſtain, and ſhe ſunk overpowered into the arms of her brother.

A crowd collected; and this adventure taking place nearly oppoſite the door of a celebrated club-houſe, ſeveral faſhionable-looking men threw up the windows, and amuſed themſelves in commenting on our ſituation. Among others, I diſtinctly heard the voice of Lord Melcomb: for though the duſk prevented

prevented my diſtinguiſhing features minutely, by the lights in the coffee-room I plainly diſcovered many perſons, whoſe obſervations were both pleaſant and various.

A coach was called; and with ſome difficulty Miſs Aſhgrove was liſted into it. A thouſand queſtions from Edward rapidly followed. I informed him, that we came to London for the expreſs purpoſe of preventing a meeting between him and Lord Denmore; that we were in private lodgings; and that, having, once more, found our brave and generous protector, we would, without delay, ſet out for Briſtol. Mr. Aſhgrove ſhook his head, and ſighed: not one ſyllable further was uttered, till we arrived at our lodgings.

On entering the paſſage, we were accoſted by Mrs. Ferret, with "Dear me! what has been the matter? Has the young lady been frightened?"

"A little

"A little ſurpriſed; nothing more," anſwered Mr. Aſhgrove, ſtill ſupporting Mary, who was ſomewhat recovered, and leaning on his arm, as ſhe feebly proceeded towards the ſtaircaſe.

"You had better walk into my parlour," ſaid our landlady, fixing her eyes on Edward with penetrating curioſity.

"I will thank you for ſome water, or any thing that can revive her ſpirits," replied Mr. Aſhgrove, as he entered the room.

"You are a ſtranger, I preſume?" ſaid Mrs. Ferret, addreſſing him. "How fortunate was the moment when the poor young Lady found a protector; for I ſuppoſe the alarm was occaſioned by ſome ſtreet impertinence."

"I requeſt you to bring me a glaſs of water," ſaid I. Mrs. Ferret ſtood fixed as a rock, ſtill viewing Mr. Aſhgrove with keen and inquiring eyes.

"Well!" exclaimed ſhe; "I always conſidered you gentlemen ſailors as the moſt polite and gallant of the human race! May I aſk your name, for the honour of the ſervice?"

"Aſhgrove," replied Edward.

"The Aſhgroves of Saliſbury?"

"Not that I know," anſwered Edward.

"A very ancient family," interrupted our landlady; "I have a couſin who married a Baronet's nephew, who was a diſtant relation of the firſt wife of the eldeſt ſon of the late Sir Perigrine Aſhgrove."

"Damn Sir Perigrine!" ſaid Edward; "where is the water?"

"A glaſs of madeira would perhaps be more efficacious," replied Mrs. Ferret, opening a cloſet and taking out a decanter. "I can anſwer for this wine being genuine," added ſhe; "for I bought

bought it of a nobleman's butler, who, though he ſold it for half price, aſſured me that it had twice croſſed the Atlantic."

"Pilfering raſcal!" exclaimed Edward; "I wiſh I had him out of ſoundings, I would give him a doſe of the green bowl that ſhould teach him honeſty." Miſs Aſhgrove having ſtrength to riſe from her ſeat, thanked Mrs. Ferret for her attention, and proceeded towards our apartments. But vain was the hope to eſcape from our never-tiring inquiſitor; ſhe followed us with perſevering attention, and, on entering the drawing-room, again addreſſed Mr. Aſhgrove.

"I am ſure I have ſeen you ſomewhere, your face is familiar to me. Perhaps at Bath, or ſome other watering-place?"

"It is of little importance," cried Edward, taking his ſiſter's hand, and preſſing it to his lips.

"I beg ten thouſand pardons," ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "I really did not know you were related to my fair inmate—Her brother? or perhaps her huſband? In either caſe I can accommodate you with apartments: of courſe you mean to remain ſome time in London."

"Only a few hours," replied Mr. Aſhgrove.

"Indeed the town is rather empty," interrupted Mrs. Ferret; "and, probably, you mean to inhale the breezes of the ſea ſhore?"

"The ſea is my natural element," ſaid Edward, ſighing as he contemplated the languid eyes and pallid countenance of poor Mary.

"And, doubtleſs, your rank in the ſervice is equal to your merit?" cried our landlady.

"Promotion does not always keep pace with peril," replied Mr. Aſhgrove. "On the quickſands to fame there are many

many rocks and ſhoals, which muſt have pilots of various deſcriptions: ſuch as, patronage, birth, or parliamentary intereſt; poſſeſs but theſe, and place impudence at the helm, and you may always ſteer clear of impediments."

"Of courſe you have been in action," ſaid Mrs. Ferret. "We have had ſome glorious victories. Our commanders have been experienced and intrepid, as our tars have been loyal."

"I was honoured with a place which might have been better ſupplied by many a braver ſailor," anſwered Edward modeſtly.

"And yet, probably, you were wounded?" ſaid our landlady.

"Slightly; a mere rap on the elbow by an unlucky ſplinter: I wiſh it had lodged in my heart, for it arreſted the beating of one which had twice my virtue." A tear ſtealing from Edward's eye, bore witneſs to his ſincerity. Fran-

ces, my ſoul ſeemed to glow with idolatry of this celeſtial being! But it was admiration, and not love that awakened the enthuſiaſm. So fine are the diſcriminations which mark our feelings.

"Well, I hope that the ſatisfaction you enjoy on ſhore will repay you for the dangers you have encountered," ſaid Mrs. Ferret.

"My recompence will be of ſhort duration;" replied Edward, with a dejected tone and a ſigh, as he again turned his eyes towards the withering Mary. "For," after a ſhort pauſe, added he, "in twelve hours I muſt join my brave companions."

"In twelve hours!" repeated Miſs Aſhgrove, burſting into tears.

"Calm your inquietude, my ſweeteſt Mary;" ſaid Edward, tenderly embracing her. "My country claims me; and I am certain that you love me too well to wiſh me diſhonoured."

"When

"When ſhall we meet again, my Edward, my brother, my protector?"—She hung round his neck, and was almoſt ſuffocated by her tears. The ſcene was touching beyond deſcription. The brave, the noble-minded Edward drooped his head; and by the preſſure of his hand upon his heart, ſeemed to anſwer, "*Never!*"

Mrs. Ferret, who had witneſſed this converſation without the ſmalleſt emotion, having obtained all the information ſhe required, now quitted the room; remarking, that her 'ſenſibility could not ſupport ſuch excruciating ſcenes.'

"In twelve hours!" again repeated Mary: "I hoped, Edward, that my eyes would behold you, as their laſt dear object.—Alas! there is now no other that can intereſt me."

"You have yet a father;" ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove, endeavouring to compoſe his mind. "Think, Mary, how many

wives, how many mothers, are doomed to part from their only ſupport; and then ſubmit with patience to your deſtiny."

"But they may live to ſee their darlings return, crowned with the laurels of victory," cried Miſs Aſhgrove.

"I will endeavour to deſerve them," interrupted Edward.

"But thoſe eyes, which would gliſten with tears of joy, will then be cloſed for ever," replied Mary, with a look almoſt angelic.

"You make me a very coward;" ſaid Mr. Aſhgrove. "I ſhould ſeek death rather than victory, could I teach myſelf to credit your prophecy." Then turning towards me, and taking my hand, he added: "Amiable Gertrude, to your friendly care, your benignant boſom, I conſign this dear, deſponding girl. Conſole her, watch her, reſtore her to her family, and I will love you—pardon the expreſſion—

preſſion—I will revere you next to the Divinity; for humanity and ſympathy united in ſuch a heart as yours bear ſtrong traits of ſomething more than mortal." I bowed a grateful promiſe to obey his wiſhes. He ſeemed ſatisfied; then, with a more cheerful tone of voice, he added; "I ſhall often think of you, when by moonlight I trace my ſhadow on the deck, while the white ſurge foams, and the wind whiſtles round me; for then is the ſailor's hour of meditation; and though he is toſſed upon the boiſterous waves, his fancy leads him to more tranquil regions."—He ſtopped abruptly; "But I am anticipating my only conſolation," ſaid he; "I ſhould reſerve it for the moment, when my heart will ſigh, for a ſubterfuge from the pains of recollection."

My anxiety for Mary's ſafety was conſiderably augmented by Edward's intended departure. I knew that ſhe

loved and valued him as he deſerved; and that, in her precarious ſtate of health, there was little probability of their ever meeting again. Indeed Mr. Aſhgrove was no leſs ſenſible of this melancholy proſpect than myſelf: his eyes were expreſſive of a tender regret, which ſeemed to dwell upon her features with a lingering fondneſs that penetrated my heart: while her countenance was the index of a conſcience pure and ſerene, and, though fraught with the fineſt affections, weary of a world which preſented no proſpect of conſolation.

The painful moment now arrived, which was deſtined eternally, on this ſphere, to ſeparate thoſe amiable mortals. I cannot picture it. I cannot find language to delineate the manly feeling of the brave, the generous Edward; or the mild, the ſaint-like reſignation which threw an undeſcribable expreſſion over the features of his ſiſter. Oh, Frances!

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to a mind ſo unſpotted, a ſoul ſo conſciouſly ſerene, Death appears diveſted of all his terrors. He wears the aſpect of a pilot who comes to guide the world-ſick, weary traveller, from a tempeſtuous voyage to a celeſtial and a peaceful haven!

A few words, faintly articulated, cloſed this heart-penetrating ſcene. Edward embraced the colourleſs cheek of his ſiſter, who, while ſhe preſſed my hand, ſeemed to loſe herſelf in rumination. I could not utter a ſyllable. In vain I attempted to bid him farewell; my tongue faltered, my lips quivered, and a ſigh, accompanied by a look which, I truſt, explained the fulneſs of my heart, followed him as he quitted the apartment.

Midnight paſſed before Miſs Aſhgrove had power to articulate a ſingle word. She then feebly exclaimed; "Oh God! I now await my final hour with reſignation!"

"Think not ſo ſadly, my deareſt Mary," ſaid I.

"How little do you know my thoughts," anſwered ſhe; "they are far, very far removed from ſadneſs. This ſeparation has been indeed an effort which I feared would overcome my fortitude. But I have now paſſed the tremendous barrier; and, with every moment, the perſpective brightens." The expreſſion of her features was ſeraphic. I envied the placid tenour of her ſoul, even at the moment when it anticipated eternity.

I now requeſted that ſhe would endeavour to take ſome reſt. She roſe from her ſeat; and, without heſitation, immediately entered her chamber. You will eaſily conjecture how the remainder of the night paſſed, till at day-break I quitted my bed, where I had thrown myſelf without undreſſing; for I was fearful that Mary's ſituation would demand

mand more than common watchfulneſs; and, therefore, with an heavy heart, employed my time in communicating my feelings, with the events of the paſt day, to you, the friend of my boſom; the counterpart of the otherwiſe peerleſs Mary.

I ſhall propoſe ſetting out, with as little delay as poſſible, for Briſtol. I now feel that there are double claims upon my friendſhip and aſſiduity: the ſorrows of poor Mary, and the impreſſive, the ſacred injunctions of the gallant Edward.—Adieu! Adieu!

LETTER LXXX.

The Same to the Same.

London, Auguſt 1, 1797.

BEFORE this time I expected to be on my journey towards Briſtol: but, alas! it has ever been my deſtiny to find myſelf deceived, when hope or inclination prompted my actions. In the morning on which I concluded my laſt long melancholy letter, we prepared every thing for our departure; after having written to Miſs Aſhgrove's father, requeſting that he would, with all poſſible expedition, follow us to the place of our deſtination.

Mary had, ſince the preceding night, only uttered a few ſentences, and thoſe merely on affairs reſpecting our journey. She alſo made ſome mournful

requeſts, which ſhe deſired me to fulfil in caſe of her diſſolution; ſuch as, bequeathing a few trinkets to her moſt intimate friends: but, particularly, ſhe commanded me to deſtroy all the letters and papers I ſhould find in a portable writing-deſk, without which ſhe never travelled. It was in vain that I endeavoured to wave the ſubject, or to perſuade her that her dejection was merely nervous, and that a change of air and ſcenery would renovate her ſpirits. "At all events," ſaid ſhe, "my mind will reſt more tranquil, after having confided to your friendſhip that which will endear me to the memory of thoſe I love, when all the pangs of deſpair will be, by me, forgotten."

The chaiſe was ordered to the door by eleven o'clock; and it was within a quarter of an hour of the appointed time, when Mrs. Ferret abruptly entered our apartment, with a myſterious look and manner,

manner, evidently the effect of ſome new and important circumſtance. "So," ſaid ſhe with a half ſneer, "the young ſailor has left you, and you are preparing to quit London: I am ſure the ſooner you are gone the better; for had I known as much as I now do, I never would have taken under my roof ſuch ſuſpicious characters."

I only anſwered her with a ſmile. She ſeemed mortified by that ſilence which is ever the greateſt puniſhment a vindictive ſpirit can encounter; as well as the moſt marked inſult which truth, and a juſt ſenſe of injury, can experience. She felt its meaning; and, after a pauſe of ſtifled indignation, again addreſſed me.

"I have heard all that you wiſhed to conceal; and I now know whom and what you are."

"What I am?" repeated I haſtily.

"Yes; the runaway miſtreſs of Lord Denmore; whoſe leaſt claim to notoriety

is

is that of having been more buſy in the fate of his poor Lady, than either virtue or morality would ſanction. I have heard the whole ſtory; and were it not out of pity towards Miſs Stanley, I would make her acquainted with the conduct of her intended huſband.

"You know Miſs Stanley?" ſaid I, trembling and agitated.

"To be ſure I do; and Lord Denmore too: I have known them both theſe many years: the Lady has been one of my very beſt cuſtomers."

"For Heaven's ſake, tell me who and what ſhe is?" interrupted I.

"For what reaſon?" inquired our landlady, throwing herſelf into a chair, and looking ſtedfaſtly at me. "God knows, you are not ſo communicative that I ſhould feel an inclination to oblige you."

"Indeed, the matter intereſts me nearly," ſaid I.

"I do

"I do not queſtion it," replied Mrs. Ferret; "but what is that to me? there can be no union in our fortunes or ſentiments, which ſhould make the diſcloſure either pleaſant or profitable: What ſhall I gain by attending to your intereſt?"

"The gratification of doing a good-natured action; and of relieving a mind which is exceſſively agitated."

"Well! and what is that to me?" ſaid Mrs. Ferret. "I never trouble myſelf about other people's affairs; for why ſhould I meddle with what does not concern me? Beſides, I ſee nothing, either in your face or conduct, which aſſures me of your ſecrecy."

"I have reaſons for my ſolicitude; and they are of the utmoſt importance," ſaid I.

"I dare ſwear, nothing more than a childiſh, or, more properly ſpeaking, an impertinent curioſity," replied Mrs. Ferret. "What can Lord Denmore's marriage

marriage with Miſs Stanley have to do with your happineſs? Every thing like attachment has long been at an end between you; and you have ſince ſhown too ſtrong a partiality for Mr. Treville, to hope that my Lord will be ſwayed by your opinion."

"Heaven knows I do not entertain ſuch hopes," anſwered I.

"I am happy to hear it," cried my good-natured landlady; "for, by all accounts, his Lordſhip has totally baniſhed you from his affections."

"I fear ſo!" ſaid I, ſighing.

"I know ſo," interrupted Mrs. Ferret with a malicious ſmile, which evinced the pleaſure ſhe experienced in my humiliation. "Indeed," added ſhe, with a fiend-like ſatisfaction, "his new attachment is ſuch as would animate a heart of marble; for a more charming woman does not exiſt than the object which excites it."

"Indeed!

"Indeed! what ſort of woman is ſhe?" ſaid I, with increaſing inquietude.

"Why, wonderfully handſome! and ſuch a wife as will do honour to his rank and fortune."

"Is ſhe young?"

"Very," replied Mrs. Ferret, looking round her with an air of indifference.

"Is ſhe accompliſhed?"

"Exceſſively!" was the laconic anſwer.

"Of what country?" ſaid I.

"I never inquired: I am not one of thoſe people who love to aſk impertinent queſtions."

"Has ſhe any fortune?"

"I don't know."

"When are they to be married?" ſaid I with increaſed impatience.

"Very ſoon."

"Within

"Within a week, or a month, probably?" ſaid I.

"I cannot ſay."

"Where is Lord Denmore at preſent?"

"I have not heard."

"In town, or in the country?"

"Moſt probably either one or the other," anſwered Mrs. Ferret.

"I perceive that you are determined to torment me," ſaid I; "and I know not which to admire the moſt, your good-nature or your laconic anſwers."

"I am no great talker," replied Mrs. Ferret.

"Except when you wiſh to obtain information," ſaid I.

"I have anſwered all your queſtions," cried our landlady peeviſhly. "I have told you that Miſs Stanley is an angel; and that Lord Denmore idolizes her beyond all other objects. What more do you wiſh to know? I ſhould think this

this intelligence would at leaſt ſerve for one day's ruminations." I heard her with a forbearing pride, which kept my reſentment in ſubjection; though, at the ſame moment, I could have wept like an infant.

"Are you certain that you are not miſtaken?" ſaid I, after a pauſe of ſeveral moments.

"There can be no doubt of the event," replied our landlady; "for the whole town talks of it; while both parties are envied by all the faſhionable circles." Mrs. Ferret watched my countenance, not to contract the latitude of her malice, but to enjoy the agony which ſhe laborioufly inflicted; for ſhe is one of thoſe malignant harpies who delight in propagating tales of buſy calumny, merely for the gratification of humbling their object. She knew that her nature was malevolent; and it was the pride of her heart to wound and

oppreſs

oppreſs that ſenſibility to which ſhe felt conſcious of having no pretenſions.

The chaiſe now arrived at the door; and Miſs Aſhgrove, who had reſted on the bed, with the hope of ſleeping half an hour before our departure, entered the room, ſaying ſhe was ready to attend me. Mrs. Ferret now roſe from her chair, and, with a ſoftened ſmile, approached me.

"Come, come," ſaid ſhe, "I have not the heart to let you go ſo unſatisfied. I will tell you a great deal more reſpecting Lord Denmore, if you will, in return for my confidence, make me one promiſe."

"I will promiſe any thing that is reaſonable," ſaid I.

"I wiſh to extort nothing that can be of importance to you," replied Mrs. Ferret. "But a ſtrange degree of anxiety poſſeſſes my mind to know who was the bearer of this packet." As ſhe

ſpoke,

ſpoke, ſhe drew from her pocket a ſealed parcel, with a ſuperſcription. I put forth my hand to receive it; when, receding a few paces, ſhe added, laughing at the ſame time, "I am ſure he is a man of conſequence by his effrontery, for I had ſome difficulty in preventing his delivering the meſſage in perſon." I fixed my eyes on the writing, which Mrs. Ferret held at a cautious diſtance; and you will judge of my ſurpriſe, when I diſcovered that it was the identical packet which Lady Denmore had given me, with ſuch awful injunctions a ſhort time before ſhe expired; and which, in the exceſs of my affliction, I had left behind me at Edgware.

I felt my colour change: my heart throbbed convulſively; my limbs trembled; and I was apprehenſive that I ſhould faint, before I had power to explore this myſterious parcel; this taliſman, which a lovely martyr had conſecrated

conſecrated with her laſt ſigh, and which was deſtined to unravel a web of fate at once intricate and perplexing.

You will eaſily conjecture the ſtate of my ſenſations at this important moment. I felt as though I ſtood upon the margin of a precipice, from which I contemplated a proſpect vaſt and variegated. On one ſide, in fancy, I beheld a ſcene of ſtorms, dark, overwhelming, and terrific: on the other, a brightening horizon, diffuſing its animating luſtre on the extenſive richneſs of ſummer ſplendours. To deſcend from the altitude of allegory, I now hoped that my ſorrows would ſpeedily terminate; that the myſtery of my fate would be completely developed; that my innocence of every offence would be aſcertained; and the reward for my paſt ſufferings be at leaſt repoſe from perſecution.

The viſible perturbation of my mind produced but little effect on the feelings of our landlady, who, having returned the packet into her pocket, again requeſted that I would inform her whom and what the perſon was who had delivered it to her care. "He was very importunate," ſaid ſhe, "and aſked me a thouſand queſtions; how long you had been in London, where you were going, and who was the companion of your journey. He alſo ſaid that he ſhould call again to-morrow, and that he was determined then to ſee you."

"Did he leave no name?" ſaid I, ſcarcely able to articulate the words.

"None; though I aſked him at leaſt twenty times to tell who he was," anſwered Mrs. Ferret.

"Pray give me the packet," ſaid I.

"Preſently: you are in ſuch haſte," cried our landlady, "that you make me forget half my meſſage."

"Well,

"Well, well, deliver it briefly," ſaid I, "or I ſhall expire with impatience. Or you can give me the papers, and inform me of your converſation after I have read them."

"Tell me the gentleman's name then."

"I do not know it."

"And yet it is evident you are no ſtranger to the contents of the parcel: this is a mere evaſion; and I have a ſtrong inclination to keep it, till the perſon who entruſted a ſource of ſuch infinite anxiety to my care, ſhall return to deliver it himſelf: for, now I think of it, what ſhall I get by interfering in the buſineſs? It is no concern of mine. It may be ſedition or treaſon, for aught I know to the contrary; and I may be implicated in the crime for only touching the envelope. And now I think of it, the perſon did look rather ſuſpicious, and ſeemed to ſpeak as though he was

conſcious of ſome villany. I have a great inclination to take the packet to thoſe whom it may concern, and who will liberally reward me for my trouble."

"The papers are not of a political nature, I aſſure you," ſaid I; "they are merely the detail of domeſtic events."

"How can I be certain of that?" interrupted Mrs. Ferret. "What proof have I that you are not an evil-minded perſon, hoſtile to the peace of your country, and a promoter of civil diſcord: and, now I recollect, the gentleman ſaid that you were not likely to remain long concealed; for that a perſon of the higheſt conſequence was at this moment in ſearch of you."

"Heavens! how you agitate and torment me!" ſaid I. "You know not what you do in detaining thoſe papers. My happineſs, perhaps my exiſtence, will depend on their being reſtored to my poſſeſſion."

"You

"You know what they are then? You have ſeen them before? Very ſuſpicious truly! But I am not eaſily impoſed on," ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "I feel the importance of this matter, and value life too dearly to riſk it for a trifle."

"I ſhall not exiſt, if you any longer withhold them," ſaid I.

"That confeſſion alone is ſufficient to authorize my keeping them," replied Mrs. Ferret. "They are ſealed with three impreſſions, and, on each, a coronet. Very myſterious indeed! The perſon who left them refuſed to tell his name; and your agitation proves beyond all doubt, that they are of the utmoſt importance: theſe circumſtances almoſt amount to proof poſitive. Thoſe who are innocent have nothing to fear: if the papers are of an unlawful ſpecies, why, I ſhall be conſidered as an acceſſory in their miſchievous tendency: if they are merely domeſtic, what ſhall I gain

by reſtoring them? I like to go on ſure ground. No quickſands for me, young lady. Therefore, to end this uſeleſs altercation, I will keep the papers, till the perſon who delivered them to me ſhall call for an anſwer."

"You will not, you cannot be ſo inhuman," ſaid I, endeavouring at the ſame time to ſuppreſs my tears.

"What ſhall I get by my humanity?" replied Mrs. Ferret. "Theſe are not times for people to be prodigal of their favours. I have made a reſolution not to do what is abſurdly called good-natured actions. I mean to live for myſelf alone, and to ſet both the opinion of the world, and the ſneers of thoſe who vaunt their finer feelings, at defiance."

"Do you not live for your fellow-creatures?" ſaid I.

"I live by them, which is a much wiſer plan," anſwered Mrs. Ferret.

"Alas!"

"Alas!" ſaid I, "my fortune is too ſcanty to allow me the means of purchaſing your generoſity, or of ſetting the ſtamp of ſterling gold on your benevolence. But I would be grateful beyond all example: I would devote my days to your ſervice, if you would reſtore to me thoſe precious papers."

"What advantage ſhould I derive from that?" replied our landlady. "You confeſs that your days are days of ſorrow; and I ſhould be much benefited by the participation, truly! No, no, young Lady, the friends I wiſh to hold, are thoſe who will contribute to my intereſt and amuſement: thoſe who will bring mirth and fortune with them, who will always wear a face of ſmiles, and require nothing of me but to partake of their advantages. I hate your everlaſting croakers; your children of calamity, who act upon the heart as a perpetual torpedo."

"Do you not feel ſome gratification in ſympathiſing with the unhappy; in conſoling the unfortunate?" ſaid I.

"I really have not had ſufficient experience in either caſe, to aſcertain the extent of its advantages. I always make it a rule," ſaid our landlady, "to fly from diſtreſs; it affects my ſpirits, and diſcompoſes the nervous ſyſtem: and what are the ſorrows of the whole world, in compariſon with one's own private feelings?"

"That ſpecies of reaſoning may be extremely prudent," ſaid I, pacing the room in the utmoſt agitation: "but it has little to do either with religion or philanthropy."

"Religion is almoſt exploded; and every pretender to humanity now calls himſelf a philanthropiſt," ſaid Mrs. Ferret. The truth of this remark prevented my making any comment. After a

ſilence

ſilence of ſeveral minutes, I again entreated her to reſtore the papers, and to permit me to ſet out on my journey.

"One day," ſaid ſhe, "cannot make any great difference: the packet is a moſt ſuſpicious packet: it looks and it ſmells like treaſon; and it is the duty of every loyal ſubject to be careful, and to examine all writings that paſs through their hands; and to give information where they find ſuch ſymptoms of guilt, as three ſeals, and a ſuperſcription—*To her whom it concerns.*"

Such were the words written by Lady Denmore on the envelope.

"Beſides," continued our landlady, "I am bound to diſcloſe all tranſactions of this nature. I am handſomely rewarded for keeping an eye upon certain people of certain opinions. I have the *entre* of half the faſhionable houſes in town, in the only circle where one may

obtain intelligence of all that paſſes: for it is not the heads of families that take the lead in political opinions: there are thoſe in great houſes, who, while they ſeem to obey, rule the deſtiny of their employers; and they find their advantage in their aſſiduity."

"I do not comprehend you," ſaid I, peeviſhly; and nearly wearied to diſtraction by her inhuman conduct.

"How ſhould you?" cried Mrs. Ferret: "you are neither a private ſecretary, nor a confidential *femme de chambre*: you never indulge conviviality till the prudence of taciturnity is forgotten: you have neither a place to loſe, nor a privilege to gain: you are independent; and look not to a general ſcramble, as the laſt retreat from ruin and diſhonour."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed I.

"Then what have you to fear? the papers will probably exonerate you from

from every imputation; and to-morrow they ſhall be examined."

"By whom?" inquired I, trembling and alarmed.

"Leave that to me," ſaid Mrs. Ferret: "that will be my buſineſs, and not yours."

"You will not dare to expoſe my concerns to ſtrangers," cried I, with evident indignation.

"When you preſume to meddle with that which does not concern you, what right have you to complain?" replied our landlady. "It is to ſuch buſy, meddling ſpirits as yours, that the globe may owe its diſaſters: and though I deſpiſe the overbearing tyranny of perſecution, I alſo deteſt the never quiet, diſcontented being, who would, for private intereſt, be the inſtrument of public calamity; who, to gratify an individual's ambition, would deſtroy the happineſs of millions."

"I applaud your ſentiments," ſaid I; "but they are in no reſpect connected with my preſent ſolicitude. The papers in your poſſeſſion are wholly unimportant to all exiſting beings excepting myſelf."

"There lies the neceſſity of my detaining them," anſwered Mrs. Ferret: "for what does your modern patriot conſider, beſides himſelf? What rules the opinions and the actions of half the world—but ſelf? What makes the great ſtoop to little actions, and the little aſpire to great atchievements? ſelf.—Nothing but, what a ſenſible writer terms, that deteſted ſubject, ſelf! Shew me in the circles of a court, or in the humbler paths of life, a being who is truly diſintereſted; who values his country's fame beyond his private emolument or his public reputation, and that moment the papers ſhall be yours."

"Your conduct proves the truth of your opinion," ſaid I: "and ſince neither

neither perſuaſion nor a ſenſe of juſtice will induce you to reſtore them, I will try what the power of compulſion will do; for, if you preſume to break one ſeal, or to unfold one paper, I will, to the extent of thoſe laws which were formed for the ſecurity of the people, make you a public example." Mrs. Ferret ſmiled defiance.

"How little do you know about the matter!" ſaid ſhe. "How feeble will be your ſtrength to reſiſt the ſtrong arm of power, when it is exerted for the preſervation of a nation's tranquillity. If you are innocent; if your papers contain nothing inimical to the peace of your fellow-citizens, you will have them reſtored to you, after they have been properly examined."

"And what recompence ſhall I obtain for the expoſure of my domeſtic concerns, and the ſtigma that will reſt upon my name, after having been once

ſuſpected of acting baſely and traitorouſly towards my country?"

"That is not my buſineſs," ſaid Mrs. Ferret. "I have no intereſt in what you may feel, or in the conſequences that may follow. I am only actuated by patriotic virtue, and an enthuſiaſtic adoration of civil order."

"And do you receive no emolument for your indefatigable labour?" ſaid I. "Surely the exalted ſouls of thoſe whom you ſerve repay your ardour liberally."

"That is no buſineſs of yours," replied our landlady: "but you are fond of aſking impertinent queſtions."

"Do you not think that I may have the power to recompenſe you at ſome future period; and can you not believe that there may exiſt both generoſity and gratitude in the humble paths of life as well as in the more exalted?" ſaid I.

"I never found it ſo," anſwered the incautious inquiſitor; "for I ſerved the other

other party till I hazarded both my property and my exiſtence, and they never had the honeſty to reward me. There again I found *ſelf* the only idol worſhipped by every boſom."

"Then you were not always of the ſame opinion reſpecting patriotic virtue?" ſaid I.

"I am too good a ſpeculator to combine opinion and intereſt: what ſhould I get by that?" cried Mrs. Ferret.

"At leaſt you would have the ſelf-approving gratification, that you acted from principle," ſaid I.

"Mine is a more rational traffic," replied our landlady. "I reap the benefits of intereſt, without touching the tender chord of principle. But I have no time to loſe in idle converſation, or in anſwering inquiſitive people:" ſo ſaying, ſhe ruſhed out of the room, leaving me in a ſtate of ſuſpenſe, more eaſily imagined than deſcribed.

I now

I now conſulted Miſs Aſhgrove on the beſt mode of proceeding, in order to recover my papers from the hands of the ſubtle Mrs. Ferret; whoſe character, as delineated by her own words, gave me but ſlender hopes of retribution on the ſcore of honour or conſcientious feeling. I beheld, in the being who poſſeſſed the clue to my perplexing maze of exiſtence, all that was baſe, mean, ſordid, and deceitful. I was convinced that ſhe would not heſitate to ſacrifice even thoſe who were moſt dear to her, could their deſtruction, in the ſmalleſt degree, gratify her avarice, or feed her inſatiable curioſity. What then had I to hope from ſuch a mortal? What, but perplexity, and the expoſure of that ſecret, the developement of which had been ſo long the labour of my thoughts.

After having deliberately retraced, in memory, all the circumſtances attending Mrs. Ferret's extraordinary conduct;

and

and weighing, in the even ſcale of prudence, the conſequences that might attend a precipitate deciſion; we reſolved, as patiently as the agitation of my mind would permit, to await the reſult of the next morning's proceedings. We hoped that our inquiſitive landlady would either ſoften the ſeverity of her ſuſpicions; or deem it more advantageous to rely on my generoſity, than to hazard the poſſibility of a diſappointment, where ſhe hoped, by my conviction, to obtain her reward. As ſhe was a tolerable and experienced ſpeculator, the chance was in our favour: becauſe a falſe alarm would not only give us cauſe for triumph; but would alſo expoſe her to ridicule and cenſure, as an incompetent negotiator.

How to make time paſs, we ſcarcely knew, at this momentous period. Miſs Aſhgrove felt ſo ſtrongly intereſted in my

my fate, notwithſtanding all the malevolent reports which ſhe had heard to my diſadvantage, that ſhe looked forward to the next twelve hours, with a degree of ſolicitude ſcarcely deſcribable. Ah, Frances! how heavily did my weary heart throb, while I felt the moments moving tardily towards that epocha which I conſidered as both awful and concluſive. "To-morrow," ſaid I, with a mournful preſentiment; "to-morrow will either renovate my long expiring hopes, or fix the laſting fiat of my deſpair."

The chaiſe was ſent from the door; and Mary ſeemed enlivened more than I had ſeen her during many weeks, by the proſpect which now preſented itſelf. The ſingularity of my ſituation ſo far occupied her mind, as in ſome meaſure to alleviate its diſtreſs for Edward's departure: and, whatever my deſtiny may be,

be, I ſhall lament in a leſs degree its ſorrow, or feel more exquiſitely its felicity, on the reflection, that for a few hours it ſoftened the regrets of ſo amiable a mortal.

Adieu, Frances! adieu.

LETTER LXXXI.

The Same to the Same.

Auguſt 4, 1797.

We paſſed a night of the moſt extreme agitation, after I cloſed my laſt long detail of extraordinary events. Miſs Aſhgrove's mind was little leſs unquiet than my own; and we converſed on anticipated ſcenes, till day had ſome time peeped through our curtains. The conduct which our landlady had already diſplayed, gave us but faint hopes of any thing

thing from her like liberality; we had therefore only to watch and wait, and to beguile the hours with all the patience of philoſophy.

While we were earneſtly converſing on the important ſubject, I ſuddenly heard a carriage ſtopping at the ſtreet-door. I haſtily flew to the window, and only opened the curtains juſt in time to ſee Mrs. Ferret enter a poſt-chaiſe, and drive off with all poſſible expedition. I thought I ſhould expire; my heart ſeemed to grow cold within my boſom, my limbs trembled, and I threw myſelf upon the bed, while, with quivering lips, I faintly exclaimed, "Oh God! all, all my hopes are at an end, and I am now loſt for ever."

Though ſeveral minutes paſſed before I had power to explain the cauſe of my chagrin, Mary, on hearing the carriage rattle over the pavement at ſo ſtill an hour, and ſeeing me dart from the window

window like one that was frantic, eaſily gueſſed the cauſe of my emotion. She roſe, and ſoon hurried on her morning-dreſs, while I remained nearly deprived of reaſon.

"This is the time to exert all your energy," ſaid Miſs Aſhgrove. "Rouſe your mind from the diſtreſs that will enervate, if not palſy its faculties. This ſhe-devil has unqueſtionably decamped with your papers; and we muſt by ſtratagem endeavour to make thoſe diſcoveries which neither her honeſty nor your ſituation could effect."

"All, all is over," ſaid I with a wildneſs of tone which made Miſs Aſhgrove ſhudder; while ſhe earneſtly entreated that I would inſtantly dreſs myſelf, and follow her counſel. My ſoul was rapidly loſing its reſiſting ſtrength; and I leaned upon her friendſhip as my laſt and only baſis of conſolation. I therefore, ſcarcely knowing what I did, obeyed her

her injunctions, again put on the travelling habit which I had worn the preceding day, and ſubmitted myſelf entirely to her guidance.

We now ſummoned the ſervant of the houſe, and inquired whether ſhe could inform us what road her miſtreſs had taken. She anſwered only by monoſyllables; and the firſt ſhe uttered was "No."

"Where did ſhe order the horſes?" She was ſilent.

"Will ſhe return ſoon?"

"No."

"Do you know where ſhe is gone?"

"Yes."

"And you are commanded not to tell?"

"Yes."

This cautious mode of replying was ſo perfectly ludicrous, that it reminded me of a ſcene in a comedy; and notwithſtanding my diſtreſs, I could ſcarcely forbear

forbear ſmiling. I now thought of trying a more powerful interpreter than words; and taking two guineas from my purſe, informed the female orator Mum, that they ſhould be hers, if ſhe would candidly anſwer all my interrogatories. She glanced firſt at the gold, then at the tempter: her boſom ſeemed to labour with the ſecret, which this deſtructive magnet was now rapidly drawing from it, and after a deeply-murmured ſigh, ſhe exclaimed, "So help me, God! I'll tell you all I know; for you are a pretty, good-natured, generous young lady, and deſerve to be truſted."

I was too well acquainted with the character of the miſtreſs to rely implicitly on the veracity of the maid: I therefore reſolved not to proceed one ſtep on uncertain ground, but to reward the damſel's domeſtic treachery in proportion to the magnitude of the diſcoveries

veries ſhe made. She has been tutored in the ſchool of her employer, and was therefore no ſtranger to this mode of payment. Neither did I feel the ſmalleſt degree of compunction, in bribing the honeſty of one who was an adept in the arcana of political deception: for I knew enough of the world to be aſſured, that beings of this deſcription have their price, which will at any time balance the equilibrium of their principles.

My queſtions were repeated; and to my great joy I diſcovered that Mrs. Ferret had ſet out for Cheltenham in ſearch of Lord Denmore; that ſhe had obtained her information of his being there from Miſs Stanley's *femme de chambre*; and that ſhe had left word, if the gentleman who confided the packet to her care ſhould call again, that ſhe had delivered it to the perſon moſt entitled to her attention, and who had both power and

inclination

inclination to reward her for her trouble. With a thouſand thanks I gave the ſervant her well-earned guineas, and deſiring her again to order a chaiſe, reſolved on immediately following her, to demand my papers in the preſence of the capricious Lord Denmore.

In leſs than an hour we recommenced our journey. As ſpeed was of importance in our ſituation of hope and fear, we ordered four horſes, and flattered ourſelves with the idea, that on the road we ſhould overtake our deſerter. But, alas! ſhe travelled alſo on the wing of ſolicitude, and all our exertions proved ineffectual.

In eight hours we reached Cheltenham. On our ſtopping at the inn, we found the houſe a ſcene of the utmoſt confuſion. A traveller had bee robbed and ſlightly wounded by a ſingle highwayman. This intelligence, which, at any other period, would have intereſted my feel-

ings, now ſcarcely excited my attention. I inquired firſt for Lord Denmore, ſecondly after Miſs Stanley: the innkeeper informed me, that they were both at Cheltenham, and that in a few minutes he would direct me to their lodgings.

My perturbation was exceſſive: at one moment I felt that I was breaking in upon Lord Denmore's domeſtic repoſe with an unwarrantable freedom; that he had an indiſputable right to form any connection, or avow any attachment he thought proper. But the next, my aching heart aſſumed a power, pre-eminent and excluſive, over the actions of the treacherous being who had only awakened me to hope, for the gratification of teaching me to deſpair. Reaſon, and the cuſtoms of the world, or at leaſt of poliſhed ſociety, would have whiſpered, that a violation of propriety was double unpardonable, where gratitude ſhould have bound me to obſerve it ſacred.

But,

But, oh Frances! Reaſon had long been rendered ſubſervient to the faſcination which enthralled it. Every action of my life, ſince I have known Lord Denmore, will prove that Reaſon and Affection, ſuch as mine, are incompatible.

Again I conſulted Miſs Aſhgrove on my meditated viſit. She diſapproved the project, and aſſured me that ſuch a ſtep would not poſſibly be productive of any advantageous conſequences. "You will perhaps meet with a cold, if not an agonizing reception: you will behold a rival—an inſulting, a triumphant rival; one who aſpires to that heart which your merit claims excluſively, and which debaſes itſelf by its capricious apoſtaſy."

"I will ſee him, if but to tell him ſo," ſaid I.

"And he will ſmile at your reproof," anſwered Miſs Aſhgrove: "for, believe me, Gertrude, when once man has

the diſhonour to deceive us, he feels but little impreſſed by the reproaches of our deſpair, though they flatter his ſelf-love, and feed the vanity of our rival. Leave him to reflection; and Time will reſtore him to a ſenſe of his own folly. He will regret the rational, the intellectual hours which you have paſſed together; he will, in memory, retrace the progreſs of your affection; and the object of his preſent attachment will become hateful to him, when he beholds her as the barrier betwixt him and his loſt happineſs." Though my ſober judgment would have applauded this counſel, my infatuated mind repulſed it with abhorrence.

"Never," ſaid I, "never ſhall Lord Denmore know what I am doomed to ſuffer by his unkindneſs. But my pride, my indignation will not allow me to reſt tranquil. I will ſee him, to prove, in the preſence of Miſs Stanley, how relentleſsly

leſsly I hate him: I will demand my papers, defeat the infamous informer who detained them, and await the return of Edward Aſhgrove, to be his for ever."

Mary ſhook her head ſceptically. "Heaven forbid!" exclaimed ſhe, taking my hand, and ſmiling; "Heaven forbid that Edward's happineſs ſhould depend on the paſſions of a mind like yours, Gertrude; a mind irritated by diſappointment, agonized by jealouſy, warmed by affection, and diſordered by the indignant ſcorn of violated confidence! There is no ſpecies of revenge ſo barbarous as that of ſacrificing an unoffending being, merely to humble the pride, or to puniſh the falſehood, of a leſs worthy object."

While ſhe was ſpeaking, the landlord entered the room with a direction to Lord Denmore's lodgings. I ſnatched it eagerly, and would have inſtantly

departed; but Mary, with all her ſtrength, ſtill held me. "I conjure you to reflect," ſaid ſhe: "I entreat you to ſeek after your important packet, and to relinquiſh the frantic idea of viſiting Lord Denmore." As ſhe pronounced theſe words, he paſſed the window. I ſhrieked, and nearly fainted. Miſs Aſhgrove ſupported me till I reached a chair, into which I threw myſelf, overwhelmed and feeble.

The evening was now cloſing; and I felt my ſpirits ſo entirely exhauſted, that I had not power to execute my plan: I therefore reſolved to indulge in ſuch ruminations as my pillow would allow, ſilent and unmoleſted. I had frequently found, in the progreſs of my deſtiny, that thoſe reſolutions which have been allowed the interval of ſleep, were moſt rational, and leſs dangerous in their tendency. Bathe your reſentment in that meliorating balm, ſaid I,

and

and Time will complete your cure: Time, which brings the antidote of ſorrow, the balſam of conſolation.

I aroſe early on the following day, ſomewhat more compoſed, though no leſs determined to purſue my original plan of ſeeing Lord Denmore. I therefore adorned myſelf with more than my accuſtomed care, ſelected the moſt advantageous morning-dreſs, aſſumed a countenance of tranquil thought, and at ten o'clock repaired to his lodgings.

Grown ſelf-important by the ſpirit of reſentment, I fancied myſelf the moſt heroic of mortals. I buoyed up my ſinking heart with the ſtrong nerve of indignation; and, proud of what I conſidered as the triumph of Reaſon over the affections, I felt brave, even to enthuſiaſm. I will humble this preſuming tyrant, thought I. He ſhall be taught to feel the vaſt ſuperiority which rectitude diſplays, when oppoſed to folly

and hypocriſy. Such were my tacit vauntings, till I reached the door of Lord Denmore's habitation: I then began to feel a trembling timid ſenſation, which made my cheek redden with ſhame. I ſtopped to recover my fortitude. I recollected his paſt conduct; the retribution which it was my duty to demand, and the determination I had made to ſee him once more, and then to bid him farewell for ever. I approached the threſhold; but how ſhall I deſcribe my diſappointment, when I heard that Lord Denmore had, at eight o'clock in the morning, quitted Cheltenham with Miſs Stanley.

I now returned to Miſs Aſhgrove, who eagerly inquired the reſult of my viſit. I had ſcarcely words to tell her what I felt, or to entreat her ſympathy. She rejoiced to find that I had not ſubjected myſelf to any new mortifications by an interview with Lord Denmore;

more; and, after a ſhort converſation, we agreed to dedicate the remainder of the day to our inquiries after Mrs. Ferret.

Before we had reſolved on our plan of arrangement, we were informed that a perſon, whoſe name was not mentioned, requeſted permiſſion to wait on us for a few minutes on buſineſs of importance. The ſingularity of the meſſage induced us to admit the ſtranger; and ſhortly after Mrs. Ferret entered our apartment.

The moment I beheld her, my mind anticipated an event which would inevitably deſtroy all my pleaſing and deluſive proſpects. I received her with a marked and contemptuous coldneſs. She felt its effect; and, with a degree of humility which evinced her diminution of power, ſtood heſitating before me.

"I truſt," ſaid ſhe, faltering between every word, "I hope that you will pardon all that has happened, on my aſſur-

ing you how ſincerely I regret the uneaſineſs I have occaſioned, and how zealous I ſhall be, in making every recompence in my power for the loſs you have ſuſtained."

"The loſs!" repeated I with agitation. "For Heaven's ſake be explicit. I truſt you have not been ſo raſh, or ſo diſhoneſt, as to ſacrifice my eternal peace of mind to your own intereſt."

"Hear me with patience," cried Mrs. Ferret. "Perhaps all may yet be well: inform me what route you take, and where you mean to paſs the remainder of the autumn; and I will not fail to ſend you every communication in my power."

"Be brief," ſaid I; "and, if poſſible, for once ſubdue your inquiſitive mania. Where is the packet which you ſo infamouſly detained, againſt all the laws of honour and humanity?"

"There

"There lies the difficult queſtion," replied Mrs. Ferret. "Have you no remote idea who the perſon was, that left it at my houſe? If that could once only be aſcertained, your papers may be reſtored to you."

"This is not anſwering my demand," ſaid I. "Again I repeat the words, Where is my packet."

Mrs. Ferret grew pale, and viſibly trembled. Then drawing her hand from under her cloak, I obſerved it was wrapped in bandages; and all my fears were confirmed indubitably.

"You have been robbed," ſaid I. "You have loſt the laſt ſource of happineſs which this world afforded me."

"Were the writings of ſuch an important tendency?" inquired Mrs. Ferret.

"They were the only means of my reſcue from deſpair and ruin," ſaid I.

"Well, there is yet one conſolation," interrupted Mrs. Ferret. "The villain

who ſtopped me will never dare expoſe them; and were I to ſee him, I ſhould know his face amongſt a million." I made no comment: my heart was too full to allow my tongue the power of articulation.

Mrs. Ferret now aſſumed a new ſpecies of myſterious importance. "What will you give me to tell you who the perſon is, that robbed me of your papers?" ſaid ſhe, taking a chair, and recovering from her fearful humility.

"All I poſſeſs on earth!" ſaid I eagerly. She again addreſſed me:

"Tell me the important ſecret they contain, have confidence in my honour, convince me that they were not of a political nature; and perhaps, notwithſtanding the treatment I have received, I may feel inclined to ſerve you."

"I do not know their contents," ſaid I. "Would to Heaven I did!"

"I ſee you are determined to be cautious," cried Mrs. Ferret; "and as

ſincerity can alone enſure confidence, I ſhall be as reſerved in my communications, as you are in your converſation." She was riſing to quit the room, when I caught her arm, and in the agony of impatience threw myſelf on my knees before her.

Miſs Aſhgrove now darted towards me, and, with a tone of dignified reproof, inſiſted that I ſhould ceaſe to debaſe myſelf by any farther ſolicitations. "I will reſcue you from this abominable harpy," ſaid ſhe, compelling me to riſe: "I will enforce that juſtice which ſhe withholds with the hope of extorting a reward for her honeſty." So ſaying, Miſs Aſhgrove rung the bell violently: a waiter entered the room. "Secure this woman," ſaid ſhe, "and inform me where I may find an officer of juſtice, who may legally guard her, till ſhe is examined before a magiſtrate."

"Upon

"Upon what pretext, Madam?" ſaid the waiter, aſtoniſhed at the propoſal.

"She has robbed this lady," replied Miſs Aſhgrove. The man heſitated no longer; and Mrs. Ferret was mute with conſternation. The various characters of countenance which in a few minutes ſhe diſplayed, proved the ſecret ruminations of her mind. She bit her lip with rage, and ſmiled with the anticipation of revenge, alternately. At length, ſummoning courage to expreſs her indignant contempt, ſhe exclaimed: "Curſe ſuch ungenerous and malignant ſpirits! But I ſhall yet triumph; for I have that protection which is above the reach of malice."

"Not above the laws," ſaid I.

"The laws will acquit me," replied Mrs. Ferret; "for my intention will at leaſt exonerate me from my ſuppoſed crime: elſe who would follow the occupation?"

"Infamous

"Infamous woman!" exclaimed I. "How miſtaken is that generoſity which would patronize ſuch a being!"

"Spare your invectives," interrupted Mrs. Ferret; "for, in the preſent caſe, they will avail but little. I have that protection on my ſide, which will at leaſt defeat your malice." I underſtood the meaning which her words conveyed, and ſhuddered at the depravity of her heart, while I ſilently lamented that the evidence of avowed infamy ſhould have power to endanger the fame, or the ſafety of a fellow-creature.

The hardened effrontery with which ſhe awaited the execution of my menaces, convinced me that ſhe little feared the conſequences which might follow. She ſmiled defiance; ſhe fixed her eyes on my face with the bold, inquiſitive perſeverance of a practiſed offender. Mary's agitation was trivial, in compariſon with mine. She was merely actu-

ated

ated by ſympathy; while I, ſtanding on a perilous precipice, beheld either felicity or deſolation, as the developement which muſt take place ſhould terminate my proſpects. Ah, Frances! how agonizing was my ſituation!—depending on the expoſure of events the moſt important, as my only reſcue from deſpair; compelled to demand juſtice of one who had that patronage for her ſhield, oppoſed to whoſe invulnerable ſtrength the power of truth and the pleadings of nature would prove unavailing. Yet I reſolved not to relinquiſh my purpoſe, but to drag forth the lynx-eyed monſter from her den, even though ſhe might poſſeſs the death-darting poiſon of the baſiliſk. An hour paſſed: ſtill I waited with impatience, and ſtill ſhe looked defiance to my threats; but my determination, if poſſible, to recover the important papers, gained ſtrength, in proportion as Mrs. Ferret evinced her

her conſciouſneſs of ſafety. While we were thus ſituated, on a ſudden her countenance diſplayed a kind of mental revolution: ſhe firſt formed her features into a fixed gravity, as if abſorbed in thought; then, in a moment, they ſeemed to brighten with a new anticipation of ſucceſs; and, on Miſs Aſhgrove's leaving the room, with an eaſy, bold indifference ſhe again addreſſed me.

"You are acting the part of an idiot," ſaid ſhe. "You think to puniſh me, while you are in fact deſtroying your own happineſs. Reflect, I conjure you, that when once I have delivered my evidence, and repeated the confeſſions you have involuntarily made, it will be too late to recede; and though I ſhall be applauded for my zeal and integrity, you will be expoſed to the moſt imminent peril. I have more regard for your ſafety than you ſeem to believe, or indeed

indeed than you desire, by your inconsistent and rash conduct; to prove which, were you even now inclined to be grateful, I would willingly assist in your escape from punishment."

My indignation was scarcely supportable. I made no reply, but ringing the bell, inquired whether the waiter had executed my orders. The answer I received was, that the messenger had not yet returned; but that he was every moment expected. Mrs. Ferret's countenance was still unmoved; while, with a tone of voice perfectly placid, she renewed the subject of conversation.

"I know the person who robbed me of the papers," said she; "and if you act with prudence, they may yet be recovered. But if you persevere in this romantic hope of extorting justice by unhandsome means, they never shall again be yours. Weigh well your interest, therefore, in the scale with your revenge,

revenge, and ſpeedily determine which ought to be the firſt object of gratification."

This ſuggeſtion ſtaggered my ſenſes. I pauſed a few moments. I reflected on my ſituation. I began to ſuppoſe that Mrs. Ferret had fabricated a falſehood reſpecting the loſs of the papers, and that they were ſtill in her poſſeſſion. Reſentment and juſtice urged me to a public inveſtigation of her conduct; but private intereſt, the flattering hope of future repoſe, the anguiſh of an almoſt deſponding heart, and the life-weary ſolicitude of a mind perpetually haraſſed, oppoſed, and nearly vanquiſhed every other conſideration. The reſult was briefly expreſſed. "Give me my property," ſaid I; "and here the conteſt ſhall terminate."

"What ſhall I get by that?" ſaid Mrs. Ferret. "What advantage ſhall I derive from ſuch an act of generoſity?

Promiſe

Promiſe me ſome recompence that will be worthy of the ſacrifice, and the packet ſhall be yours."

"Name your demand," ſaid I.

"Fifty pounds," replied Mrs. Ferret.

"I have not ſo much money in my poſſeſſion," anſwered I.

"Perhaps your companion can lend you that ſum," cried the extortioner.

"I am too proud to borrow, even from a friend," ſaid I; "becauſe I know, that pecuniary obligations are the poiſons of ſociety."

"You are wonderfully nice!" interrupted Mrs. Ferret; "indeed, more ſo than diſcreet: but that is no buſineſs of mine; I never pry into other people's concerns: I am a woman of independent mind, and look only to myſelf for importance."

"Then you muſt know the propriety of my refuſing to degrade my feelings," ſaid I. "Yet I have no objection to making

making any promiſe that you may deem a ſufficient ſecurity for the money." Mrs. Ferret contracted her eyelids, bit her lip, muſed, and twiſted her fingers, while I awaited her anſwer with painful anxiety.

"Your promiſe, unleſs it be made in the preſence of a third perſon, will not be of any importance," cried ſhe. "Have you no jewels that you can depoſit as a ſecurity."

"I have a few trinkets," ſaid I.

"Let me ſee them," interrupted Mrs. Ferret. "I like to tread upon ſure ground. I have lived too long in the world to hazard my own intereſt for other people's advantage: theſe are not times for a prodigality of benevolence; and as I mean to thrive by my head, rather than to be a bankrupt by my heart, I requeſt the ſight of the jewels as ſpeedily as poſſible."

"They are of little value," ſaid I.

"So

"So much the worſe," replied Mrs. Ferret: "but every little is ſomething; and my maxim is, never to let Fortune's gifts eſcape me, whether ſhe beſtows them with a profuſe or with a ſparing hand; for by accumulation her favours acquire that magnitude which will tower above the prejudices of the vulgar; and to be rich is to be reſpected, even though it be at the expence of every moral virtue." I ſighed, while I confeſſed the truth of her obſervation, as I unlocked my letter-caſe, and delivered the few valuables I poſſeſſed into her hands. They conſiſted of an enamelled watch, preſented to me by the Ducheſs of Aldborough; a brilliant hoop-ring, the gift of Lady Denmore; a pearl necklace; which had been my mother's, and which my guardian had preſerved for me; with a few other trifles of inferior value.

"Theſe,"

"These," said I, as I deposited them, in Mrs. Ferret's hands, "I only part with as a security for the sum you mention." She took them, and, with a smile of satisfaction, informed me, that as soon as proper steps could be adopted, the papers should be mine: "for," added she, "the same person who left them at my house, robbed me of them on my way hither."

"Then they are not in your possession!" said I with astonishment.

"Certainly not," replied Mrs. Ferret.

"And I have given you my property, merely on the chance of their being recovered!"

"Unquestionably," answered the extortioner. "I told you that I always go on sure ground; and prompt payment in affairs of this nature is the best security for vigilance. I will do every thing in my power to convict the offender; and if he is not punished for the atrocity

atrocity of his offence, you cannot deem fifty guineas too great a recompence for my trouble." My conſternation, when I heard this evaſive reply, was only to be equalled by my credulity, in having truſted ſuch a monſter of cunning and hypocriſy. I was almoſt frantic. I demanded that ſhe would reſtore either my jewels or my papers: ſhe aſſumed an air of the moſt placid indifference, and was on the point of quitting the apartment, when the waiter, with an officer of juſtice, entered.

I ordered him inſtantly to take Mrs. Ferret into cuſtody, and to accompany me, with her, to a magiſtrate. He obeyed; and a poſt-coach being ordered, we prepared for our unpleaſant expedition.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.